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## The Living Legends of Sholoukh – شلوك الأساطير Facial Scarification in Sudan

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# THE LIVING LEGENDS OF SHOLOUKH



# ش لوخ الأساطير

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# ABSTRACT

**Sholoukh** — ritual face scarring—is a dying art form in Sudan.

Used to distinguish members of one tribe from another, Sholoukh reflects the tribal pride of an individual. In the past, sholoukh was seen as important as having a passport for a tribe member, however, it was not always applied by choice. Using just a razor blade, the wisest, most senior tribal elder would scar the face of a child, initiating them into the tribe for life.

As this tribal art form fades away, the dwindling Sholoukh-bearers have become living legends in Sudan. To honor them, I create a collage of images of these beautifully scarred individuals. To celebrate Sholoukh and its symbols while giving choice back to the individual, I create a set of facial tools that allow someone to experience the beauty of Sholoukh either temporarily or permanently, preserving this Sudanese cultural treasure and reviving it for future generations and using it to celebrate the diversity Sudan carries.



# INTRODUCTION

Identity has been represented through body modifications for centuries, and in Sudan, it started to appear on the face of its people since the 19th century during the immigration of Arab and Arab Nubian tribes<sup>1</sup>. *Shalikh* – singular of the word *Sholoukh* for Sudanese face scarification, means “the action of scarring”, “ethnicity” and “origin” in Arabic. It was equivalent to the present-day identification card and passport to distinguish members among the Sudanese society<sup>2</sup>. In the past, it was very common among young ones to have these scars on their faces, as it is considered to be a way of protection from abduction, and as they grow older it becomes a symbol of beauty and pride<sup>3</sup>. Now, *Sholoukh* is usually seen on the cheeks of older generations, since the tradition gradually fades away in major cities like Khartoum, Omdurman, and Bahri. Nevertheless, it still persists in some rural villages outside the capital.

Sudan is an ethnically rich land, therefore, throughout history it was necessary to have a way to navigate between the different communities and tribes. Although the reasons were very different, war, trading, beautification, and religion<sup>4</sup> and *Sholoukh* became the main tool of the Sudanese, and the ritual was performed at a young age<sup>5</sup>. It comes in different *symbols* or scarification marks that represent numerous

1 Hasan 1975, 10

2 Hasan 1975, 85

3 Dr. Yousif Fadul Hassan, University of Khartoum, 26 Nov 2022

4 Hasan 1975, 49

5 Hasan 1975, 51

**FIGURE1** - Hawaa Ali Al-Basir was the first female Dean of the College of Nursing. She received her Nursing degree in the United Kingdom in the 1950s. She passed away in 1973. The photograph was taken during her training in the UK; she was recording an educational health program

Instagram: SudanZaman



groups, for instance, *Alwasooq1* or *Darb Altair* (bird's path) also some call it {T}referring to the Latin capital letter which symbolized the Jaali tribe, and Sullam1 meaning stair in Arabic 'with one step also referred to as Latin letter {H} symbolizes to a Sufi sector called Alsammania as well as another sector of the Jaali tribe, and many others). The process of this ritual is done on children from the age of six to fifteen years old, as it is believed that the earlier it is done on the child, the easier they would forget the pain of the process<sup>6</sup>. Since this is an old tradition, and it is performed using traditional methods, no numbing cream or anesthetizer was used to help with pain tolerance. The ritual is done by older and well-skilled individuals, using only a blade<sup>7</sup>. They create the scar on the cheeks in a way for it to openly heal, resulting in a concave form. After the scarring, they use ash or/and grinded charcoal to help with the healing process and to maintain a beautiful dark trace of it. As painful as the process was, Sholoukh was considered as a way to protect children from abduction<sup>8</sup>. As kidnapping was widespread mostly near the Red Sea due to trading in that area<sup>9</sup>, if a child

6 Dr. Yousif Fadul Hassan, University of Khartoum, 26 Nov 2022

7 Dr. Yousif Fadul Hassan, University of Khartoum, 26 Nov 2022

8 Professor Abdunassir, Al Safaa College interview, Sudan,23 Nov 2022

9 Professor Abdunassir, Al Safaa College interview, Sudan,23 Nov 2022

gets abducted or taken accidentally, having Sholoukh secures the chances of a child being brought back to their family or tribe<sup>10</sup>.

Religion also participated in the variations of the symbols. Sufism is a common form of practice for Muslims around the world and sparked during the expansion of the Ottoman empire. It was a way of practicing the love of Allah and the prophet Mohamed through Islam Sudanese Muslims who practice Sufism, have Sholoukh for each Sheikh (Sheikh Imam) that an individual follows. This shows the dedication and pride that the Sudanese carry in Islam and Sufism<sup>11</sup>. Christianity was also present along with Sholoukh, as it was used as another method of baptism<sup>12</sup>.

Away from religion, Sholoukh was used after the period of the Kush empire, during war time, among the Dongolawi Nubian military soldiers, to distinguish the partners from the enemies around Sudan in the battle fields<sup>13</sup>The Dongolawi Nubians created two types of Sholoukh symbols, three horizontal lines and three vertical lines (figure 27): the vertical lines represented the soldiers who fought using arches, and its graphic represented the arch vertical movement toward the enemies.

10 Professor Abdunassir, Al Safaa College interview, Sudan,23 Nov 2022

11 Hasan 1975, 63

12 Mazaher Algaddal, "Heritage reclining: Al Sholoukh," Medameek, Feb 15, 2021, <https://www.medameek.com/?p=36772> .

13 Gelie 2016, 151

Therefore, Sholoukh played a major role in the past in maintaining peace, pride, and stability in Sudan. However, some view this tool as a way to support conflicts and tribalism among the Sudanese, by further highlighting and emphasizing the hierarchy among the different tribes and the opposing perspectives on who is more Sudanese<sup>14</sup>. This is argued due to the variations of the symbols of Sholoukh among the tribes around Sudan, as multiple tribes can share one symbol depending on the genetic bond of the ancestors or their geographic heritage, but it slightly differs in depth and width<sup>15</sup>. This, in some cases, is believed to have created a power dynamic that resulted in tension between tribes depending on their origins, that started as culture disputes and led to political conflicts in some cases. One of those cultural disputes was during the migrations of the Arab Bidwin tribes to Sudan in the 17th century, they felt threatened by other Sudanese tribes, because they were afraid that they would ruin their Arab entity dynamic, however, they were able to amalgamate with one another, which led to the birth of new tribes in Sudan.<sup>16</sup>

Before going to Sudan to further investigate

14 Professor Abdunassir, Al Safaa College interview, Sudan,23 Nov 2022

15 Hasan 1975, 11

16 Hasan 1975, 46

the root of this tradition and people's perception of it (both non-scarred and scarred individuals), I conducted an interview through Zoom with Alawia Ahmed, a Sudanese woman with Sholoukh now in her 50s living in London. Sholoukh was performed on her from a young age to cure an eye infection she suffered from back then. The discussion was about her and her family's experience with this tradition and the circumstances they were put through leading to the ritual by comparing different generations in her family<sup>17</sup>. Some were jealous that their older siblings were lucky enough to have Sholoukh and others were stopped by their older siblings because they believed they were saving them from going through the same painful procedure. Ms. Ahmed mentioned how the first people to stop this tradition were the families with university degrees, as it was looked at to be less modern, and hurtful to the children.

Alongside Ms. Ahmed, other interviews were conducted throughout the research, and throughout people's separate experiences, I learned that this tradition had its own way of reflecting the pride an individual can carry permanently to show their belonging to their country and tribe in addition to honoring their

17 Ahmed, Interview, 24 Nov 2022

beauty both for men and women<sup>18</sup>, and just like a person's other facial features, the Shalukh becomes a part of those features.

This thesis aims to revive the positive aspects of the tradition of Sholoukh by reconstructing the tools used to perform the ritual in a contemporary way and to reflect the historical journey that created Sudan as we know today. Throughout the research, it was concluded that the reason behind Sholoukh vanishing is the traumatic past experiences that people with Sholoukh went through at a young age. Since their elderly have taken them to get it, because of the importance of having it for protection, those children grew up disliking the ritual and forgetting its significance. Also, from a designer's perspective, the richness of this ritual is lost with the lack of tools used to conduct the procedure, as it only requires a razor blade, and someone experienced to perform it. Therefore, creating tools that are safe, user-friendly and constructed with no previous experience needed is significant to renew this ritual and present it to the new generations.

As a response to the issues mentioned previously, I created an innovative kit that contains a set of tools that are specified for each symbol and celebrates the Sholoukh ritual. The kit is

designed to allow Sudanese adult participants to experience the application of this tradition both temporarily and permanently depending on what suits the user. Also, celebrating the legends that had the chance to participate in this ritual in the past and are now rare gems in the Sudanese community. This project is meant to shed light on this tradition by bringing it back through introducing the factor of choice, and enhance the user experience.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Yousif Fadul Hassan, University of Khartoum, 26 Nov 2022

# L I T E R A T U R E

# R E V I E W

## Ways of preserving culture and identity

Cultural identity is measured and understood through different scales in society. It stands on its own to represent an individual or a group identity pride. In a article about heritage preservation, Nilson and Thorell affirm: "Cultural heritages play a strong role in both economic and social life even though the majority remains informal, without public protection and without explicit management as they are the main institutions that connect history, territory, and society, defining the cultural context of social life."<sup>19</sup> This is relevant to the cultural preservation of Sholoukh, as the ritual was protected through repetition and practice; however, now it is not seen as important as it used to be, its relevance is fading away. It also explains heritage preservation on a larger scale, such as referring to landscapes or buildings of certain groups. On the other hand, when preserving culture on a smaller scale, it applies to clothes and the physical characteristics of individuals.

Cultural preservation is an important investigation that anthropologists are aiming to understand and discover. Nonetheless, even before the birth of anthropology, body modification in its different forms was common among various cultures in Amazonia, Africa, and Asia<sup>20</sup>. They all share the use of body modification as a form of cultural preservation that they physically cannot detach from and it becomes a part of their physical characteristics.

<sup>19</sup> Nilson & Thorell 2018, 12

<sup>20</sup> Grave 2017, 709

These marks have a multiple function. It was a way of decorating oneself to achieve a beautiful look but also a way to clearly state your own identity. This concept is supported by Enid Schildkrout, a well known anthropologist, in his book *Inscribed Skin*, highlights an issue that has been central to anthropology since its inception: the question of boundaries between the individual and society, between societies, and between representations and experiences"<sup>21</sup>. The long-term commitment of belonging to a group, whether for ethnic, religious, or tribal reasons, represents a need for self reflection and solidarity and it is very similar to what we experience today in contemporary society. These commitments can be considered as outdated rituals or unacceptable practices that need to be abandoned<sup>22</sup>. However, I believe that the tradition of Sholoukh should be revised and reinterpreted as a tangible way to preserve Sudanese cultural identity, since Sholoukh is vanishing because the Sudanese stopped practicing it<sup>23</sup> due to the changes of the current modern life. Therefore, bringing it back through innovative tools would be a way of compromising with the

<sup>21</sup> Schildkrout 2004, 322

<sup>22</sup> Garve 2017, 708

<sup>23</sup> Professor Abdalnassir, Al Safaa College interview, Sudan, 23 Nov 2022



changes that occurred to the Sudanese which made them forget its importance. This project aims to bring back Sholoukh to preserve this vanishing tradition through the renovation of its practice.

## PROCESS AND RITUAL SCARIFICATION

Using the human body as a canvas is a common strategy adopted by those cultures that want to keep what best represents them, permanently inscribed onto them. Body modification rituals have multiple aims depending on the occasion, as it could be done for beauty, pride or punishment. In an article about Scarification in Sub-Saharan, Gare mentioned an example of the scarification performed in the Omo Delta in the South of Ethiopia<sup>5</sup>. The ritual is performed by older members of the tribes, who are usually blood relatives of those children undergoing the procedure, since they are considered to be the wisest and most knowledgeable members of their society. They gather the young members of these tribes, and they start the process early in the day. Without any pre-drawing on the skin to plan where the cuts will take place, the

older members of the tribe use a sharp stick or a thorn to start the hours-long scarring process. As painful as the scars are, there are no breaks taken to rest.<sup>24</sup> In Kayapó culture in Sub-Saharan Africa, body modifications are performed as life cycle rituals that create a long lasting relationship between the participants.

To define those practices, different terms were brought up by anthropologists. The term 'social skin' was utilized to describe the methods of scarification used in different cultures and it includes painful practices such as the burning or the removal of skin parts which has its permanent affect<sup>25</sup>. Social skin is an indication of the importance of social recognition, and each member of the community carries with pride the marks of the scarification. Second skin is another term that was used by anthropologists and art historians to describe the usage of masks, wigs, body paint, and other forms of body art, with an artistic purpose that is portrayed temporarily rather than permanently. The classification of the different communities still occurs today, and addresses issues of identity, through the use of fashion, tattooing and more.

Reasons behind body scarification

Body modifications are a linking tool among

<sup>24</sup> Grave 2017, 709

<sup>25</sup> SChildkrout 2004, 321

## REASONS BEHIND BODY SCARIFICATION

tribal members that does not require verbal communication. In the Polynesian setting, tattooing falls naturally in its community, which is proved through functional efficacy. Tattooing works as a battery to the reproduction of this community that their social life relies on, as it helps identifying the members of a community using this body modification method to navigate through and communicate their roles and capabilities<sup>26</sup>. As Polynesian cultures diverge due to a series of historical events that led to the creation of various communities, it becomes challenging to preserve the Polynesian societies and unify it as only one.<sup>27</sup> This as a result has led to ecological, social, and ideological shifts among different groups in contrast with one another.<sup>28</sup> Due to worldwide events, settlers that came to the Polynesian community did not want to reinvent themselves by recreating new cultures, languages, and society. Thus, they became adaptable to the

<sup>26</sup> Gell 1993, 3

<sup>27</sup> Gell 1993, 5

<sup>28</sup> Gell 1993, 5

circumstances and environment in which they found themselves.<sup>29</sup>

In a community, social reproduction uses tattooing as a tool, it is a criteria for the reproducers to portray their qualities, status, and etc, and not just solely based on the physical body. "Social reproduction is guided by collective representations, in so far the conventional criteria for reproductive success are arbitrary, even though they cannot escape from material constraints."<sup>30</sup>. Tattooing is guided by a collective representation in a certain Polynesian cultural setting, tattooing experiences produces a certain mindset that falls under a social classification in the community, it also enables a person's identity and portrays empowerment.<sup>31</sup> The bodies in the Polynesian community view the human body in an imaginary mode that is reflected as an artifact rather than a normal human being, similar to carvings, fine textile, buildings, and more. Polynesian tattooing uses a puncture mechanism to insert pigment into

<sup>29</sup> Gell 1993, 6

<sup>30</sup> Gell 1993, 7

<sup>31</sup> Gell 1993, 8



the skin. The location of the tattoo on the body varies, and depends on the age and gender of the person being tattooed. While the design of the final tattoo is symbolic on its own, the physical act of being tattooed becomes a distinct symbol of power to others in the community<sup>32</sup>.

In Sudan for instance, scarification (Sholoukh) is to be performed on the cheeks of individuals of both genders. The goal of these scars is to show that it is a part of the facial features that cannot be removed or hidden,<sup>33</sup>. However, in Zimbabwe, scars are placed in a hidden part of the body such as the chest area, because displaying a visible symbol of their identity, at the time of colonization, was a risk for the bearer's safety<sup>34</sup>. This was not the case in Sudan, as scarring occurred before colonization and the Sudanese took pride in having their marks being in a visible part of the body like the face. Currently, in many parts of the world, tattooing, a similar practice of body marking, has become widely popular and socially acceptable, but this is not the case of Sholoukh<sup>35</sup>.

In the past, cultures around the world aimed to find different methods and ways to embrace their uniqueness, whether it is to celebrate and ensure

<sup>32</sup> Gell 1993, 9

<sup>33</sup> Hasan 1975, 10

<sup>34</sup> Professor Nontsikelelow Mutiti, online interview, 2022

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Yousif Hasan, UoK interview, Sudan, 26 Nov 2022

policies or punish those who do not pursue the same ideologies<sup>36</sup>. Some of these practices are still in use today, others found ways to adapt to modern society. Tattoos, for instance, used to be strictly tribal, practiced by specific groups around the world, while today due to the technological development of tools like tattoo guns, it became a common way to celebrate social and individual identity. Following a path similar to the one followed by tattooing, I aim to modernize the ritual of Sholoukh to make it appealing to the new community of Sudan.

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Yousif Hasan, UoK interview, Sudan, 26 Nov 2022

# PRECEDENTS

## ***CULTURAL IDENTITY DECORATED: SCARIFICATION***

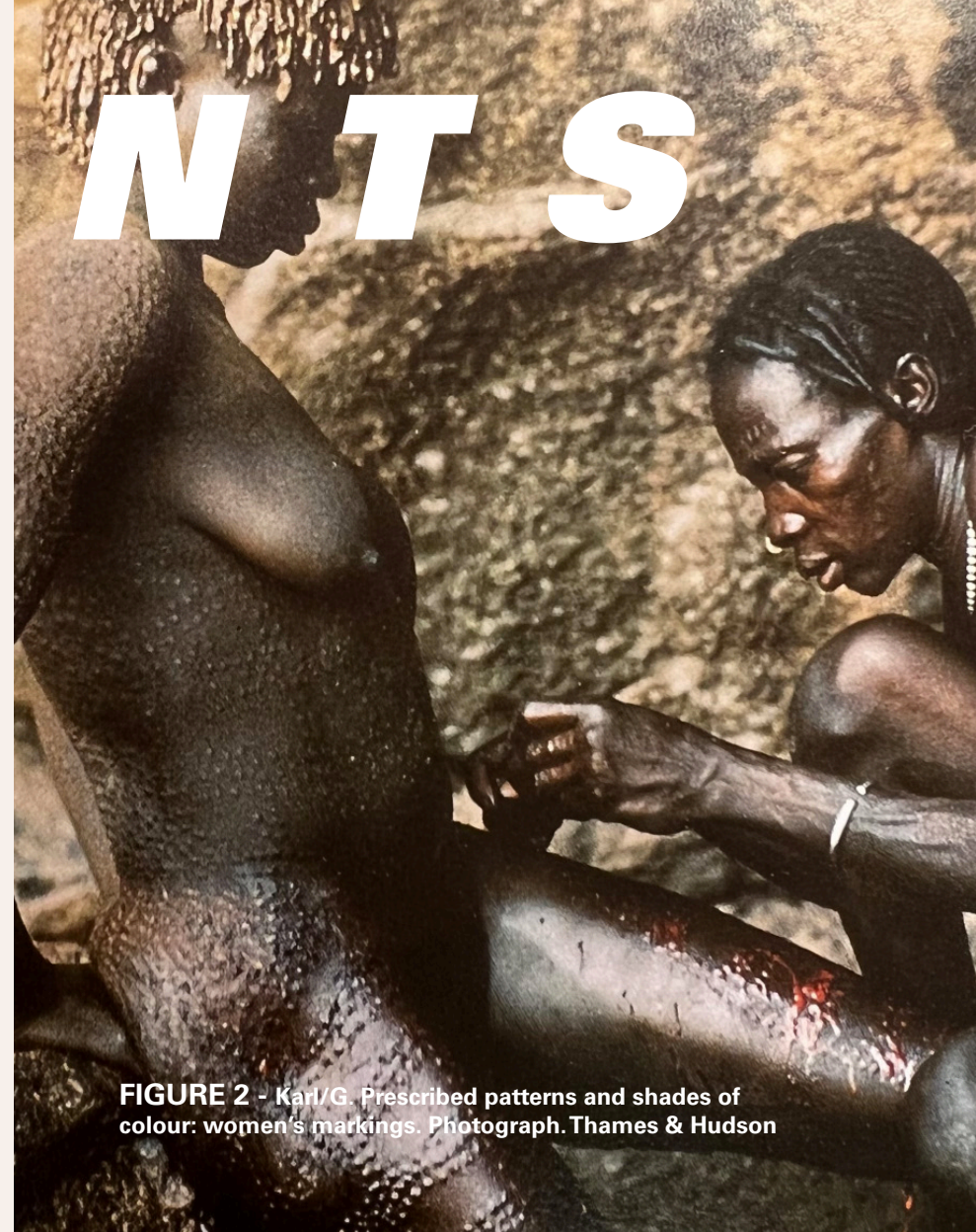
The book *Decorated Skin*, by Karl Gröning, features various body modifications from different parts of the world. The practice of body modification is most common among the tribes in Africa, and reflects on the commitment an individual has towards their group identity, and their role in society<sup>37</sup>.

In Nuba, located in Southern Sudan, the tribal members use the body as a canvas, and they take pride in portraying their role in society by using knives or blades to state their dedication and devotion. The scarification ritual has three stages: it starts from the torso, it continues on the back of the legs, and then around their body until all the three stages are completed<sup>38</sup>. The ritual was important for women, as it was used to mark significant events like virginity, pregnancy, menopause, and more.<sup>39</sup> The scars are a visible representation of a woman's life and, like Sholoukh, become a part of their bodily features: a common language that allows them to easily communicate with one another.

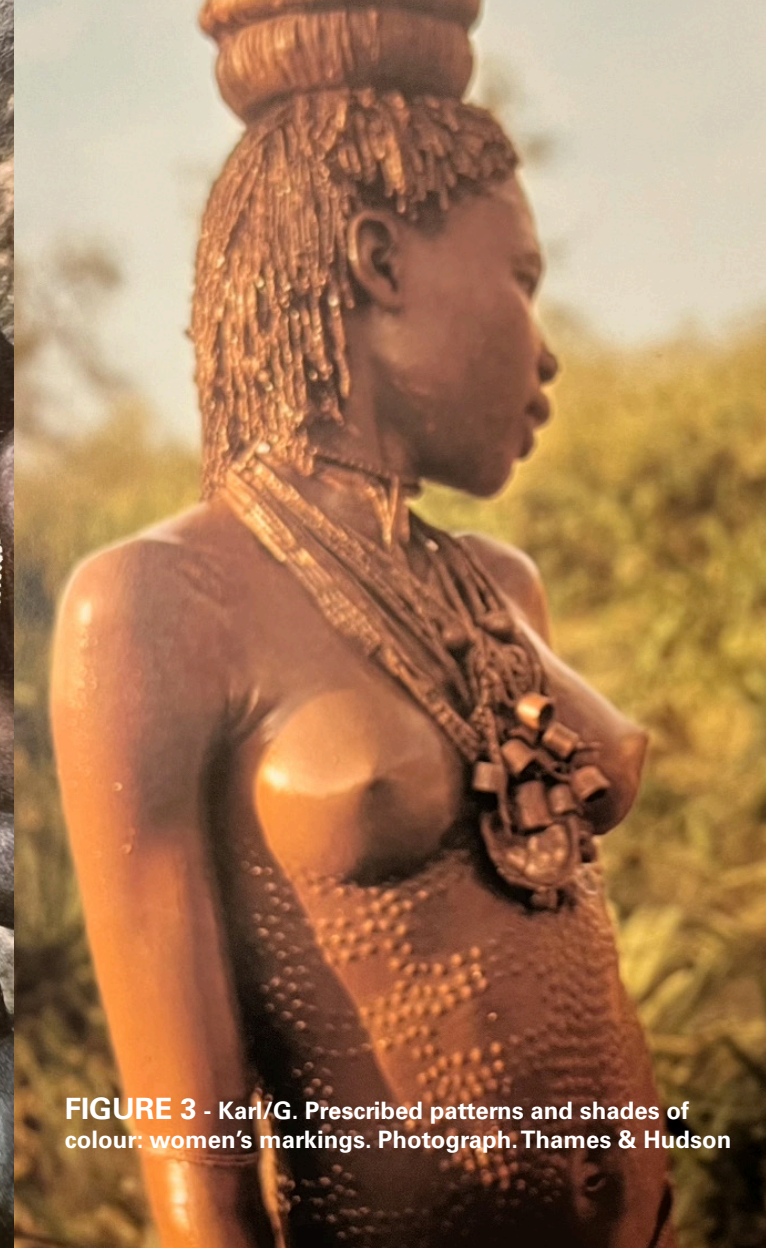
37 Gröning 2001, 146

38 Gröning 2001, 146

39 Gröning 2001, 146



**FIGURE 2** - Karl/G. Prescribed patterns and shades of colour: women's markings. Photograph. Thames & Hudson



**FIGURE 3** - Karl/G. Prescribed patterns and shades of colour: women's markings. Photograph. Thames & Hudson



## ***CULTURAL IDENTITY DECORATED: COLORING***

Another way of identifying someone's role in society would be through coloring the body and face, which is a tradition spread widely in the Nuba mountains. In farming communities such as Kau, Nyaaro, and Fungor, known by their generic name the *Nuba*, young men elevated face and body painting into a fine art form that is performed by the most talented artists in the community.<sup>40</sup> Males as young as eight years old, are identified as mature enough to take roles in their society, and body painting is considered to be their uniform. "The limited life of the painted colours and forms reflects the transience of youthful strength, health and beauty."<sup>41</sup> Some of these groups paint their bodies and have special hair styles to show a person's age group. The aim of this is to distinguish between the older boys that guard the herd and the younger ones that mainly work around the fields. This practice demonstrates how modifications, both temporary and permanent, are used in different societies, to communicate someone's role, stage in life, or in the case of Sholoukh, his/her tribal or religious identity. In this process, the use of the different colors is strict, as they stand for different

40 Gröning 2001, 139  
41 Gröning 2001, 139

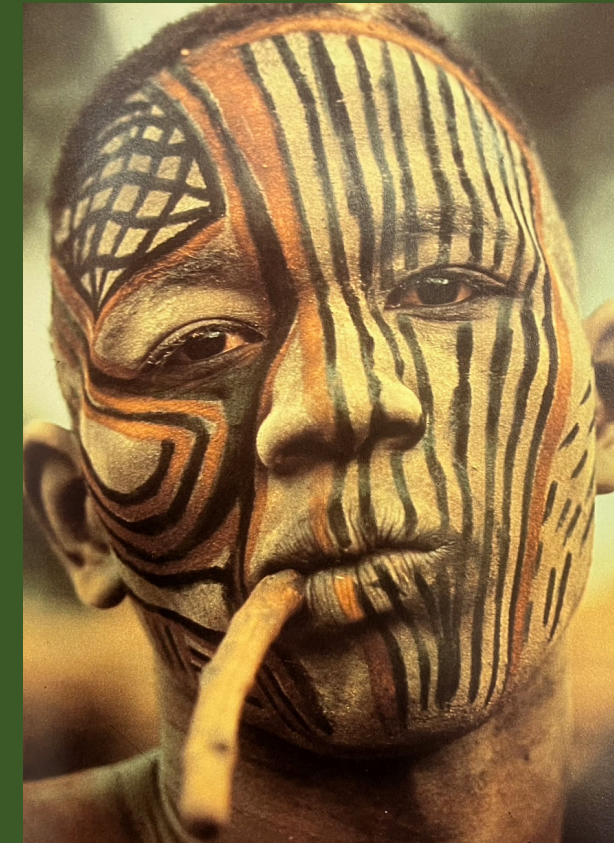
roles in their society, and they are monitored by the Nuba; therefore if any of the younger men misuse it, they would be punished by the elders<sup>42</sup>.

The process of making these artworks requires a lot of time and effort, thus, it is crucial to find ways of preserving them for the longest possible time. To avoid ruining the appearance, both men and women sleep in very uncomfortable position and they oil the skin twice a day (morning and evening) to further preserve the colors<sup>43</sup>. Although this coloring process is temporary, it is still cherished by members of the community.

This temporary coloring body practice was incorporated into the new Sholoukh's kit: the stamps were added to allow the practitioner of the ritual to test the appearance of the symbols on their face before committing to it permanently. The practice of Sholoukh has always been permanent and never had the element of option that coloring offers. Therefore, the aim is to allow the celebration of this ritual through the usage of this kit to commemorate the richness of what each symbol carries from what the land of Sudan carries.

42 Gröning 2001, 143

43 Gröning 2001, 143



**FIGURE 4 - Karl/ G. Biazarre facial decoration. Photography. Thames & Hudson**

## INTERDISCIPLINARY DESIGN PRECEDENT 1

Nontsikelelo Mutiti is a visual artist and educator originally from Zimbabwe who worked as a professor in Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond and someone I worked closely with in research from 2019 to 2020. Her work focuses on exploring the heritage of other people around the world. One of her projects is, *African Hair & African Immigration*, which is a research project she conducted to learn more about how individuals from different African countries are migrating from their home countries to places that can provide them better living circumstances, education, and more. However, even in completely foreign environments, they always found ways to connect with their roots and traditions<sup>44</sup>.

In this research Mutiti investigated places such as hair salons, for their importance in gathering African women from different backgrounds in one space where they would feel comfortable expressing their thoughts while taking care of themselves. She observed how they go about self care collectively both physically and metaphorically<sup>45</sup>. As an outcome, Mutiti created

44 <http://nontsikelelomutiti.com/>  
45 <http://nontsikelelomutiti.com/>

various projects that represented hair in multiple forms. One of them is called KUSINA MAI / KUSINA MAI FUTU, which is a typeface created by her to imitate a braiding technique carried through generations. The title of the work is taken from a famous quote of a Zimbabwe spiritual practice called Chivanhu, where it says, "Kusina mai hakuwndwi". Directly translated "Kusina mai hakuendwi" meaning "You do not go where your mother is not." which is often said to young people as an important nugget of wisdom to remind them of their origins and roots.

In this project, typography is used to reflect on a carried on tradition that maintains a certain hair texture to keep it in protected hairstyles. Mutiti was able to transform the craft of hair braiding and the hand movement that creates the braid, to become a lettering technique that speaks about heritage to different audiences in a contemporary way. Moving the braids away from its usual context, Mutiti created posters, vinyl cuts, and other three dimensional artifacts that allowed the audience to experience the



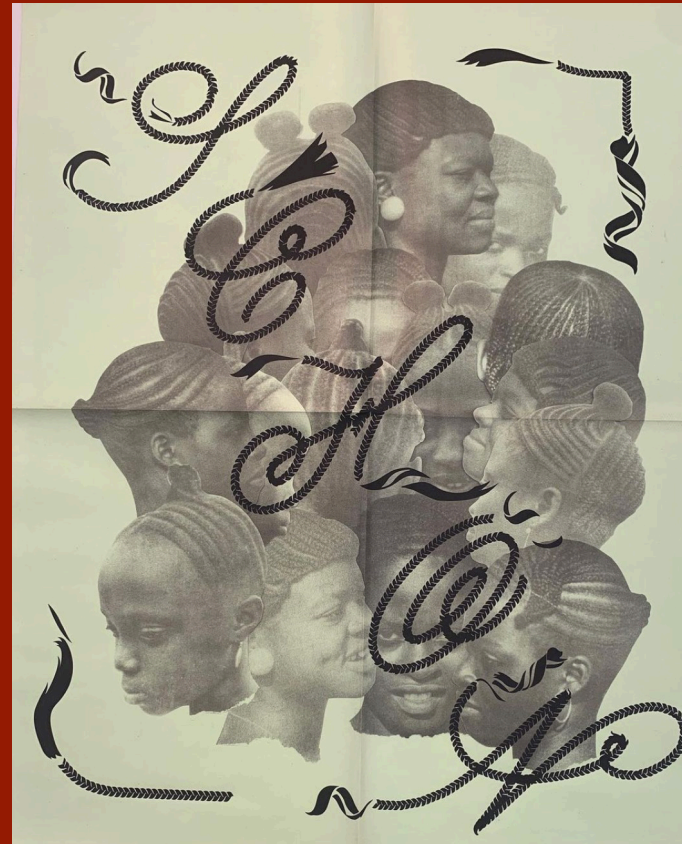
FIGURE 5 - NONTSIKELELOW MUTITI, Yale 2022



typeface, on a larger scale. In addition to producing prints with multiple printing techniques including rasoprint, to change the context of braiding by adapting it to a new form that the viewer can relate to in a contemporary way<sup>46</sup>.

Similar to Sholoukh, celebration of identity as an individual becomes a building block that is used in creating a connected group identity bond. Throughout the design process, I reflected on Sholoukh as a forgotten tradition that is challenging to maintain due to the modern life circumstances. The tools created aim to be an adaptation from the existing razor blade that is used to perform the

46 Figure 4: Nontsikelelo/ M. Kusina mai hakuwndwi. 2021.digital. 24 X 36 inches



**FIGURE 6 - NONTSIKELELOW MUTITI  
KUSINA MAI / KUSINA MAI FUTU**



**FIGURE 7 - Nontsikelelo/ M. Kusina mai  
hakuwndwi. 2021.digital. 24 X 36 INCHESI**

## Interdisciplinary Design Precedent 2

ritual, to have blade holders that control the scars and allow the users to practice Sholoukh on themselves and others. This emphasis on the richness of the tools gives it a new meaning and more control for the viewer and the practitioner of the ritual both temporarily and permanently. *The Orphanage of Things: A Narrative of Abandonment*

Social investigations and understanding cultural practices are crucial for studying the dynamics within our communities. In exploring various traditions and circumstances, diverse approaches can shed light on their significance. One example is Malaz Elgemiabby's 2015 thesis for the VCUarts Qatar MFA program, which delved into the heart-wrenching reality of abandoned babies in Sudan and the emotional turmoil experienced by mothers forced to separate from their children due to societal constraints.<sup>47</sup>

To gain insight into this phenomenon, Elgemiabby employed an ethnographic performance art approach, aiming to grasp the psychological implications of such separations.

<sup>47</sup> Elgemiabby 2015, 7

In her poignant performance piece, "The Abandonment of Breastmilk," she symbolically poured breast milk into the Venice Grand Canal while aboard a sailing boat. This act aimed to depict the profound physical and psychological transformations associated with motherhood. By visualizing the milk dissipating in the Venice Lagoon, Elgemiabby conveyed the anguish felt by a mother unable to nourish her abandoned child. She used herself as a case study, substantiating the value of her investigative method. The tools devised for the performance were simple physical objects charged with intense emotional significance. This project, like the Sholoukh ritual, unfolded in Sudan, addressing an issue that has persisted over time. Through observation and personal experience, Elgemiabby transformed her findings into objects and tools that invited viewers to engage with her performance. The Sholoukh ritual itself can be viewed as a performance resulting in marks that signify a lifelong emotional and physical commitment to a specific community. The scars referenced in Elgemiabby's work carry deep sentimental value, profoundly impacting those affected by abandonment. It is thus essential to comprehend the underlying reasons and traditions, translating them into tools that enable participants and viewers to appreciate their significance. Sholoukh marks its physical impact on a person's skin, and reflects on a shared aspect of Sudanese identity.



FIGURE 8 - Malaz Algemiabby/ Expressed breastmilk-1. 2015



FIGURE 9 - Malaz Algemiabby/ Pouring the breastmilk in the Venice Grand Canal, Venice, Italy. 2015



# ***INVESTIGATION***

## ***Pre Sudan: Ethnographic Journey***

I found the face to be a beautiful canvas to embody permanent scarring on an individual's skin. I worked on exploring multiple ways to move away from the classical razor blade by designing stamps. I also created a knife that follows the dimensions of the actual symbols in consideration of the human face. Before traveling to Sudan for a field investigation, I was trying to better understand how to prepare a user-friendly Sholoukh kit to present to the Sudanese younger generations. I explored different solutions before figuring out what they would find acceptable without challenging their modern way of living.

Additionally, this investigation happened before I had a chance to hear their thoughts about this vanishing tradition that I aim to bring back and preserve. The figures below include the objects I developed to explore stamps, jewelry and knives. I also created a collage that consists of a collection of images from different resources to better portray the depth and existence of this vanishing tradition.



FIGURE 10



In (figure 10,11 &12) the collage I created was based on the images I have collected that contain traces of Sholoukh through time. The main source of these images is Sudanzaman, an Instagram account, which contains a rich archive of images of Sudanese people proudly showing their face marks.



FIGURE 11



FIGURE 12



In (figure 13), I made some experiments with jewelry that compliments the face. I have a 3D printed face to use as a canvas, and I have created three different ways to align my pieces to it according to the face geometry, in an attempt to move away from creating the actual scar on the skin. (Figure 14) shows the experiments I did to create different stamps for the symbols H, the cross, and the three strips. Those were modeled and 3D printed and based on the existing Sholoukh symbols. Next to it, I have used existing knives that could be used to value this ritual.

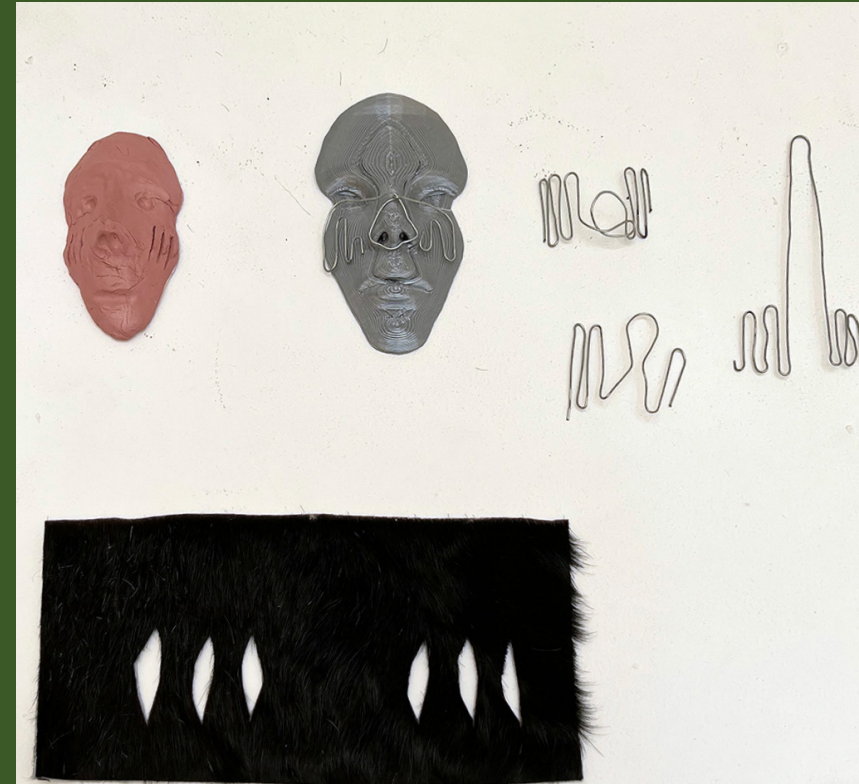


FIGURE 12

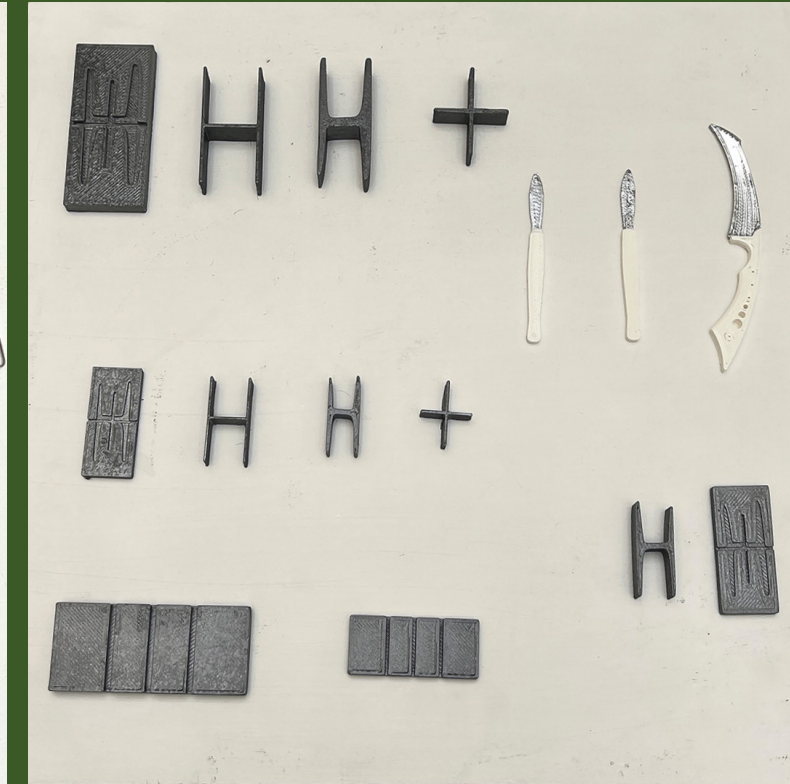


FIGURE 13

FIGURE 14

## ***Sudan : Ethnographic Journey***

In the Fall of 2022 I visited Sudan, for the first time in five years. Sholoukh opened multiple pathways to my research, as I prepared extensively for the trip. I was introduced to Professor Abdunassir from Alsaafa College, Khartoum, where he teaches social sciences. Professor Abdunassir shared with me many stories highlighting the positive impacts of Sholoukh on Sudanese society. He gave his input about how Sholoukh was used to track kidnapped children, and how these symbols worked as a shield of protection. He also reflected on the fact that Sholoukh is considered a beauty mark for women, and a symbol of strength for men, a feature pointed out by other professors in multiple interviews<sup>48</sup>.

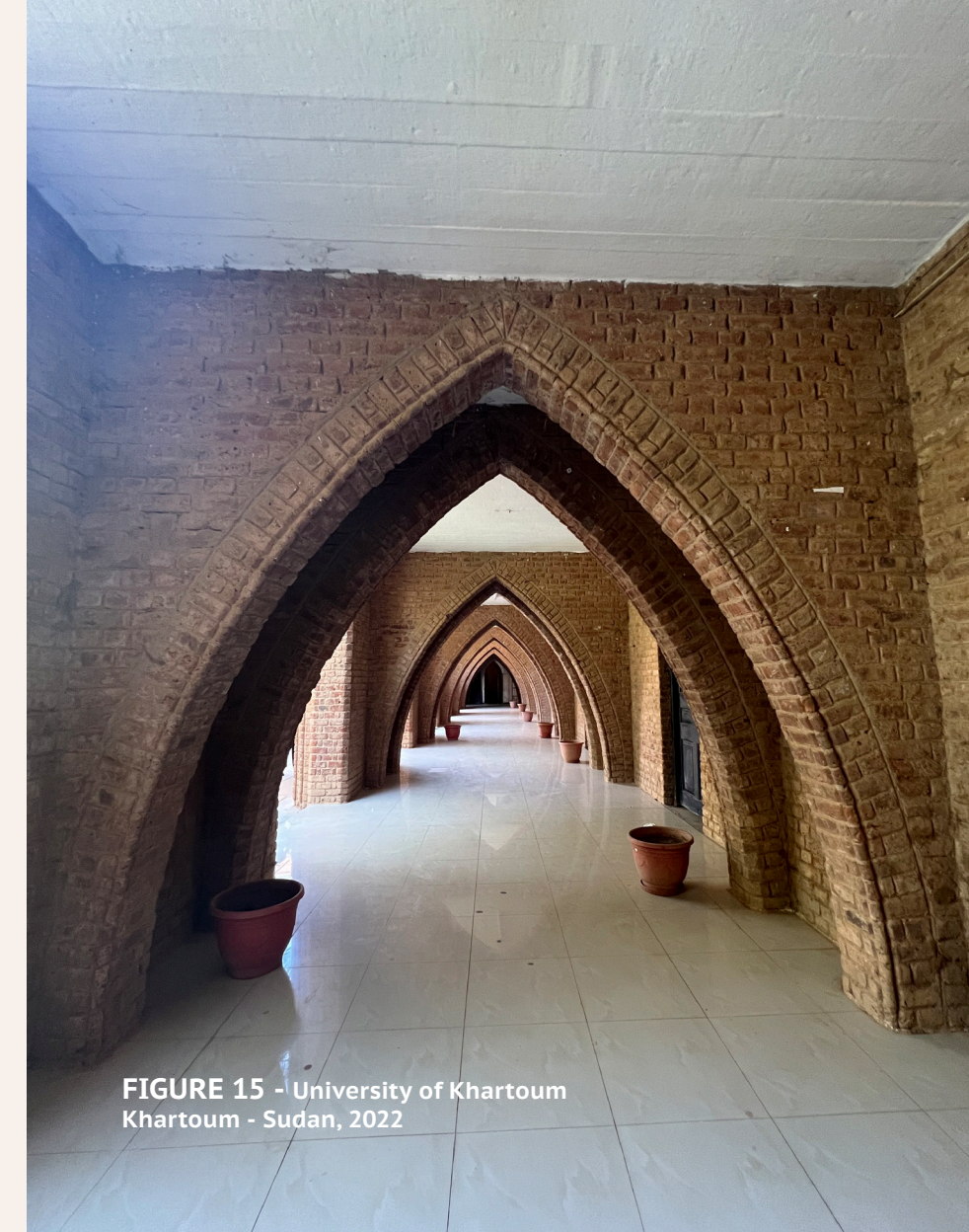
During my interview with Professor Abdunassir, I was also introduced to some of his male students, who shared with me their opinion about Sholoukh. Some of them, like Abdulla for instance, a young Sudanese man in his early 20s, was asked if it would be an issue, seeing

48 Prof. Abdunasser interview, Al Safaa College, Sudan, 2022

Sholoukh in his partner's face: he answered "no it wouldn't be a problem at all". Even his friend Mohamed, another Sudanese, 26 years old, did not mind his partner having Sholoukh. When asked if he would get it he said: "if I liked how it looked on me, or I if felt a sense of belonging towards a tribe or denomination, I would"<sup>49</sup>. He even proceeded by comparing it to the Rasitifarian movement and how dreadlocks became a part of their Identity<sup>50</sup>. However, others disagreed and thought it was good that

49 Mohamed Interview

50 Mohamed interview



**FIGURE 15** - University of Khartoum  
Khartoum - Sudan, 2022



Sholoukh is now vanishing. Khalto Rouda for instance, a tea lady in her 50's working right outside the university of Khartoum, when she was asked what she thought about Sholoukh she said "it is a horrific ancient tradition and thank God people stopped it". She was asked if she lived at the time when Sholoukh was thriving and the only thing stopping her from getting married is not having Sholoukh, would she do it? "Of course not, I would rather not get married at all". Her strong response was clear in demonstrating people's traumatic experience from getting it at a young age and the strong society pressure that came with it. Due to her age compared to other interviewees, she had a first hand interaction with people who frightened her because of the pain they had faced, and how their elderly went about it. Through these conversations I was able to better understand people's different perspectives and shed light on this tradition: this information helped me to develop the program for the new tools that I am planning to create. I have realized that it is hard to imagine the scars on the face of people in



**FIGURE 16 - Dr. Yousif Fadul Hasan, University of Khartoum Khartoum - Sudan, 2022**

current times. This has guided my design decisions by being aware of the positives and the negatives of the Sudanese communities' various thoughts, ideas, and stories behind it while focusing on shedding the light of its usefulness and solving the issues people suffered from in past experiences. In University of Khartoum (UofK), where I spent most of my time conducting research, I was able to communicate with a wonderful and supportive community of professors and faculty, and I was able to meet Dr. Yousif Fadul Hasan the author of the book "*Sholoukh: Its origin and function is in Sudan of the Upper Nile Valley*" written in 1976. Prof Hassan was a former Vice-chancellor of the University of Khartoum, and currently working in the Institute of Afro-Asian Studies. (figure 28). I had the pleasure to ask him questions regarding the reasons these symbols exist, and people's views on Sholoukh. He began by telling me his story about how he went through the ritual of Sholoukh, since (figure 25) he has the symbol of "H" scarred in his cheek. He was taken by his grandmother to have

Sholoukh. He does not remember the pain, but he does remember the joy he felt when getting it. "I was glad that I got Sholoukh like my cousins," said Dr. Yousif in his interview. After receiving his bachelor's degree he went abroad to receive his masters degree. During his studies, he was asked by a photographer "What happened to you in Africa?". Dr. Yousif answered jokingly, " I was attacked by a tiger!" It was a funny moment he remembered when encountering the response of foreigners, who saw the scar on his face and interpreted the experience as one of pain and struggle.

I proceeded to ask him why the symbols differ among men and women from the same tribe. He simply said: "Because this is a man and this is a woman!" Both genders practiced Sholoukh, but the way it was perceived by society greatly differed. For women, it was considered a sign for extreme beauty and for men it portrayed strength and power. However, this tradition did continue for a longer period of time with women.

When I asked Dr. Yousif the reason behind this, he answered “we are in a society where a woman’s beauty is more important than a man’s strength.”<sup>51</sup> This is also the reason why I was able to see more photos of women with Sholoukh compared to men.

In (figure 17) you see the beautiful Tea Lady, Fatouma. A 56-year-old woman from west Sudan. She works outside the gates of UofK selling tea and coffee. I saw her *Dag Alshallofa* (lip tattoos), which is another form of face modification used to beautify women, and I decided to interview her to ask about her tattoo experience. During the interview I was surprised to see a Sholoukh on her left cheek when she was fixing her *Toub* (traditional women’s wear) and she told me that she got it done at the age of 13 because it was a social expectation for girls of her age. I proceeded by asking her if she would do it to her daughters, she said “I do not mind, but they said they don’t want to.” It was interesting to see the change of opinions throughout the generations due to the social

<sup>51</sup> Dr. Yousif Fadul Hasan, University of Khartoum, 2022



**FIGURE 17** - Fatouma, Tea lady,  
University of Khartoum, 2022





FIGURE 18



FIGURE 19

norms and their understanding of what is and is not required by them.

When walking around campus, I passed by the wall of the Department of Archaeology (figure 18 & 19), and I noticed the resemblance of the symbols from the Meroitic script that belongs to the Kush Empire, with the symbols that are used in Sholoukh. This was an interesting observation, as I was trying to find answers regarding the origin of those symbols. The Meroic script provides minimal graphic signs that are used in Sholoukh to identify each tribe. I have conducted various interviews with professors and other individuals in Khartoum,

FIGURE 18 & 17 - Image from Archaeology section in University of Khartoum

Khartoum - Sudan, 2022



Sudan. A Lot of the people I interviewed spoke about their personal opinions and assumptions regarding how Sholoukh started, the meaning of the symbols, and why the practice is vanishing. The book *Kushar* was recommended to me by Professor Zuhair Noor Aldaym. He is a professor in the zoology department at the University of Khartoum. I asked his opinion on the Sudanese people's relation with pain, pride, and the desire to express themselves. Even during the Sudanese people's celebrations, we were able to use shoes and bags and other jewelry that uses animal skin and other parts to make our clothing and perfume like *Khumra* (bridal and married women perfume made from crocodile's nails) to celebrate weddings as a sacred ceremony. This relates back to how Sudanese people use pain to celebrate identity and show pride through the use of Sholoukh. In our conversation, there was not a clear answer regarding the need of using a painful process order to celebrate a person's identity; however, socially the pain was not seen as negative, it came along with the process of

practicing the ritual to meet the expectations of the other tribal members. The professor suggested I read the book *Kushar* by Ali Hassan Ali Gili. I had a lot of curiosity to understand the motivations behind these painful rituals that people in Sudan continue to practice and the reasons why men and women from the same tribe have different Sholoukh symbols. In this book, there are poems from the *Haqiba* musical era (Sudanese urban music genre that began in the 20th century onwards), which mentioned women's Sholoukh and the beauty of it in its romantic songs.

**FIGURE 20** - *Kushar* book by Ali Hassan Ali Gelie  
**FIGURE 21** - P.157  
 Khartoum - Sudan, 2022

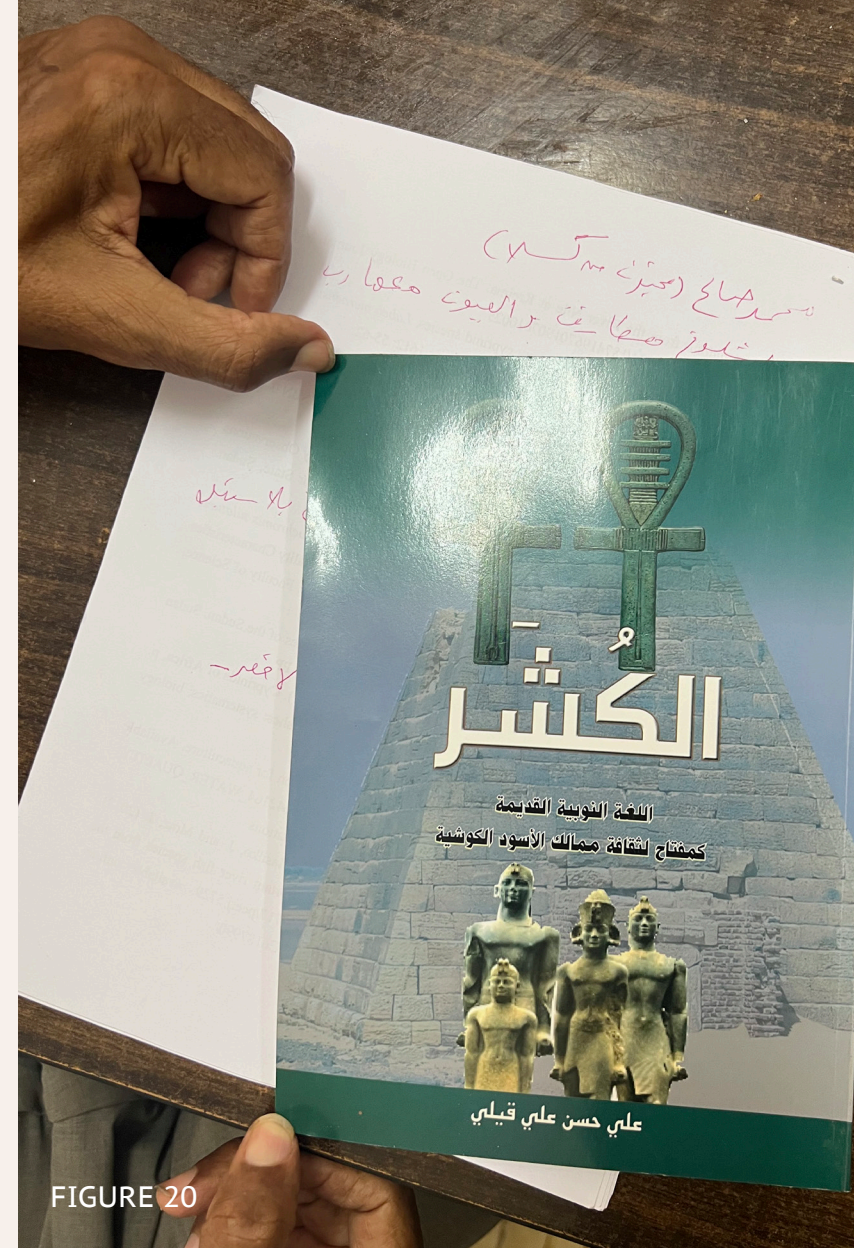


FIGURE 20

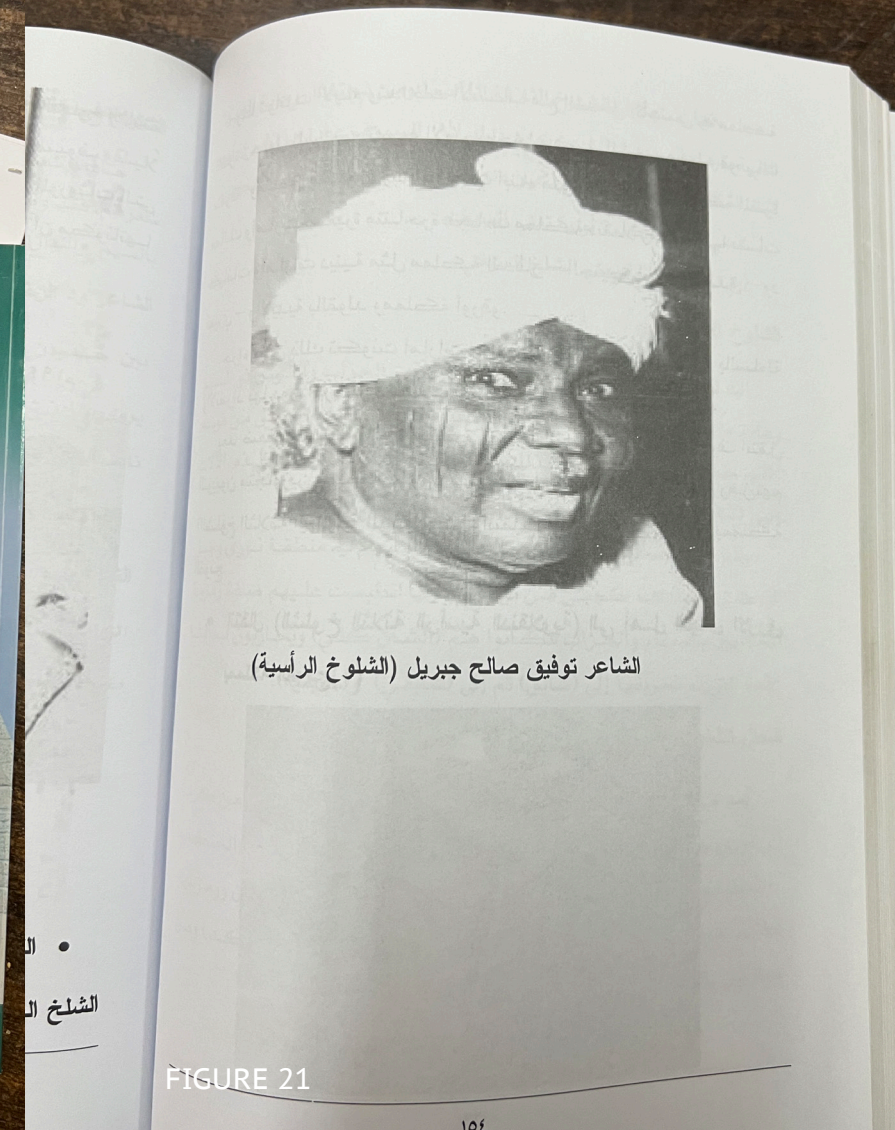


FIGURE 21

الشاعر ابو صلاح

الزول الشلوخه تلاته و من تحت وسمين ... يا قلبي بيبي و بينه اليقسمك قسمين

كيف المنام و عيونا يكونوا متفقين ... و هنا الشلوخ تتقادح و الخدود رايقين

The poet Abu Salah was describing a beautiful woman's cheeks and how her Sholoukh looked in a flirtatious way, and how it rips his heart out from its beauty.<sup>52</sup>

52 Alkhushar 2016, 157

الشاعر سيد عبد العزيز

مالي إذ أصبح مهيون ... لملكة جنوده شلوخ و عيون

The poet Said Abdalaziz described himself by saying, it is okay if I am weak for a queen that has Sholoukh and eyes as guardians<sup>53</sup>

53 Alkhushar 2016, 158

Another member of the University of Khartoum is Dr. Abbas Ahmed Alhaj. He majored in ancient history and during our conversation, he stated how the Sholoukh symbols have familiar characteristics that were seen before in the history of the Sudanese Empires. Sudanese people have always been very spiritual, "Sholoukh were never random, there is a theory that they could be spells from the past that protects individuals from bad luck and disease."<sup>54</sup> He continued stating that, in spite of their minimalistic designs, they had a crucial role in Sudanese society as they were identification tools used to navigate through the different communities. He also mentioned the story of a group of American researchers that arrived in Sudan for cotton harvesting. One of the men met a Sudanese woman with Sholoukh and got married to her. After having two kids, he had to travel back and forth from the US to Sudan. When the kids reached an age suitable to receive Sholoukh, the Sudanese side of the

54 Dr. Abbas Ahmed Alhaj, UofK, 2022

family started to put pressure on the mother.. The ritual was performed without informing the father. When the father found out, it was a true culture shock for him, since he was coming from a country where scarring was seen as ugly, and in Sudan it was considered beautiful<sup>55</sup>.

55 Dr. Abbas Ahmed Alhaj, UofK, Sudan, 2022



I was out in Khartoum, and the waiter that came to take our order had scarification on his arms. It was instantly a topic of conversation. He started telling me about his roots that go back to the Foyng Sultanate in the Blue Nile area in Sudan. It was amazing to learn about this rich history and see how it is permanently embedded on his body.

I concluded my trip to Sudan by meeting Dr. Alsadig Ajabna. He works in the Environmental Studies Institute in UoK, he shared his thoughts and opinions regarding this topic, and we discussed the variety of Sudanese culture. He shared with me a book that contained keywords of all tools, animals, events, and other relevant issues in the Sudanese Arabic dialect.



**FIGURE 22** - Nemerie, Roots restaurant, Sudan, 2022



# O U T C O M E S

## *Post Sudan Kit*

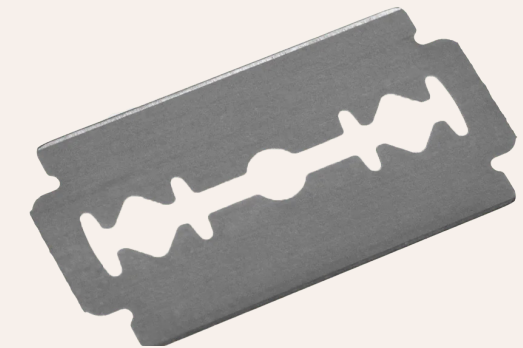
The richness of Sholoukh appears in the face of our elderly from the moment it first started till our current times. However, the tools to perform this ritual do not reflect this richness. They consist only of the classic universal razor blade and a person to perform the ritual, normally the wisest women in the village with many years of experience.. Since it is a vanishing tradition mostly practiced in the villages of Sudan, it is not easy to find a person performing this ritual.

The goal of my thesis is to create tools that are suitable to be used by Sudanese adults, who have no experience creating Sholoukh, with accuracy and precision. Moving away from the simple razor blade, the design of the tools reflects the shape of the Sholoukh, and offers the user the opportunity to either temporarily imprint the skin or permanently etch it. The new tools provide the user with a sense of familiarity.<sup>56</sup> They are intended to be used by Sudanese adults, including the Sudanese diaspora, allowing them to make an informed decision:

<sup>56</sup> Payyanur, "Using the power of familiarity in design"

trying Sholoukh temporarily or commit to it permanently. The tools will help to preserve the Sholoukh culture and to honor Sudanese tribal diversity beyond its geographical boundaries.

The kit contains a set of tools that consist of stamps and blade holders for each of the three different scar symbols. As the symbols of the scars vary amongst Sudanese tribes, I chose to experiment with three different shapes in order to explore the differences in terms of fabrication and use. The three selected symbols are the Cross, the H, and the Three vertical stripes. The variety of the forms helped me to explore different hand gestures and design tools that work more efficiently when practicing the ritual.



**FIGURE 23 - Razor blade**



FIGURE 24 - H symbol - Hasan 1975, 52



FIGURE 25- Cross Symbol - Hasan 1975, 54



FIGURE 26 - Three strips (wider) Sholoukh symbol - Hasan 1975, 60

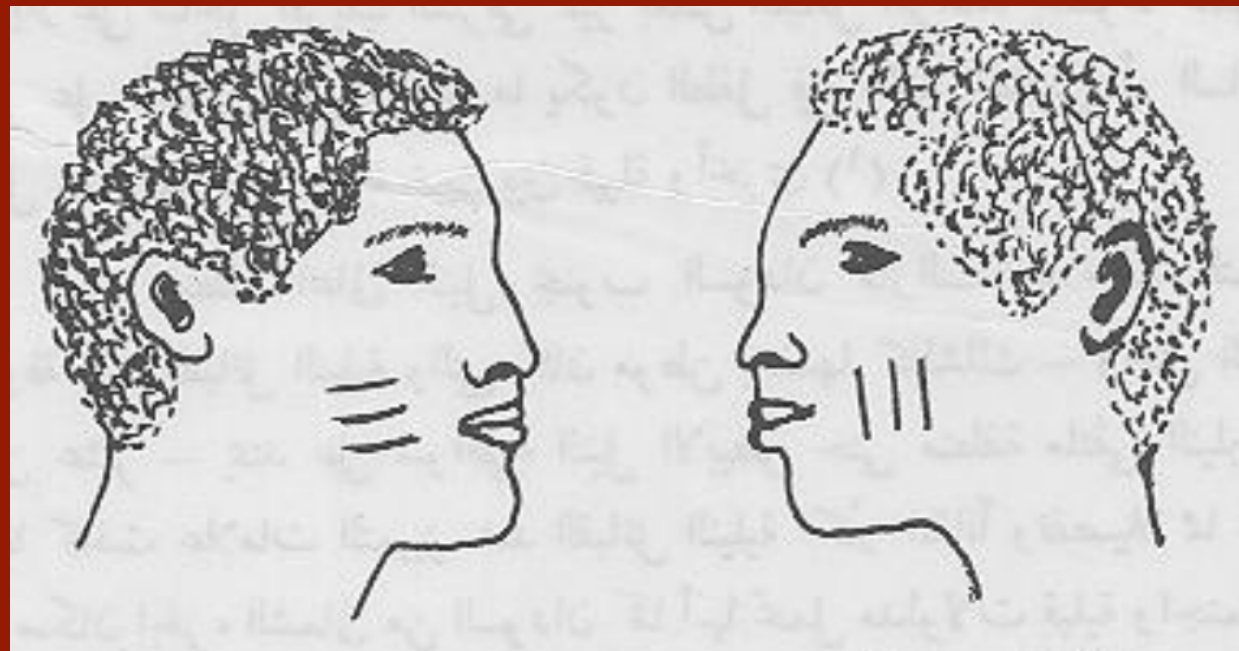


FIGURE 27- Three strips (tighter vertical & horizontal ) Sholoukh symbol - Hasan 1975, 36



FIGURE 28 - Other symbols - Hasan 1975, 79

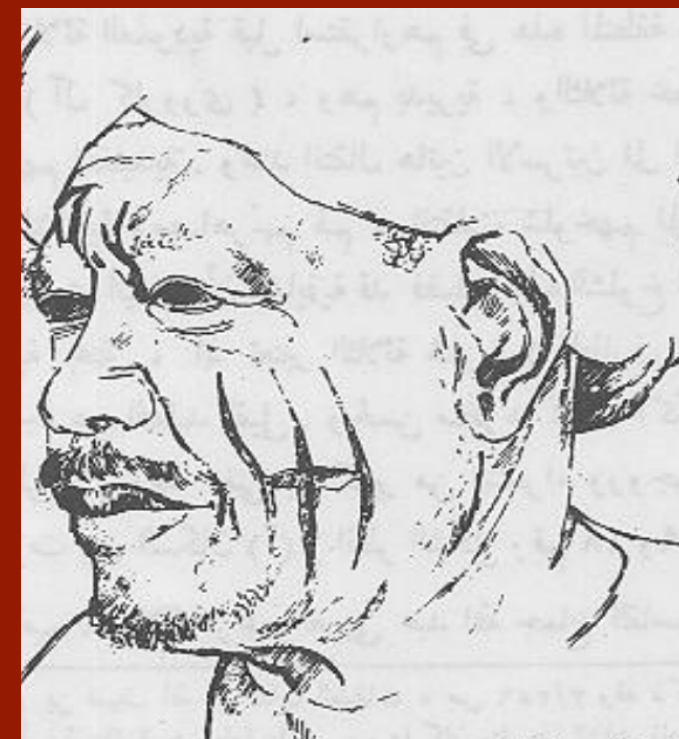


FIGURE 29 - Other symbols - Hasan 1975, 58



## 1. STAMPS

Stamping is the first step, as it is meant to leave a temporary mark on the face skin similar to sleeping marks. It will allow the users to see how they would look with Sholoukh. I used Wenge, a dense African hardwood to create these objects. Wenge wood is commonly found in central Africa, including the Republic of the Congo, and is used in creating veneers, furniture, and musical instruments<sup>57</sup>. It is known for its durability, dark color, and unique grain pattern. The wood tools were carved with a CNC (computer numerical control) machine.

I conducted several experiments to determine a size and shape that would be user-friendly, comfortable in the grip of the hand, and comfortable when pressed against the face. I used 3D modeling software (Rhino) to visualize the designs according to the existing symbols. Early experimental models can be seen in Figure 40. I worked with different shapes in an effort to replicate dimensions similar to authentic Sholoukh scars.

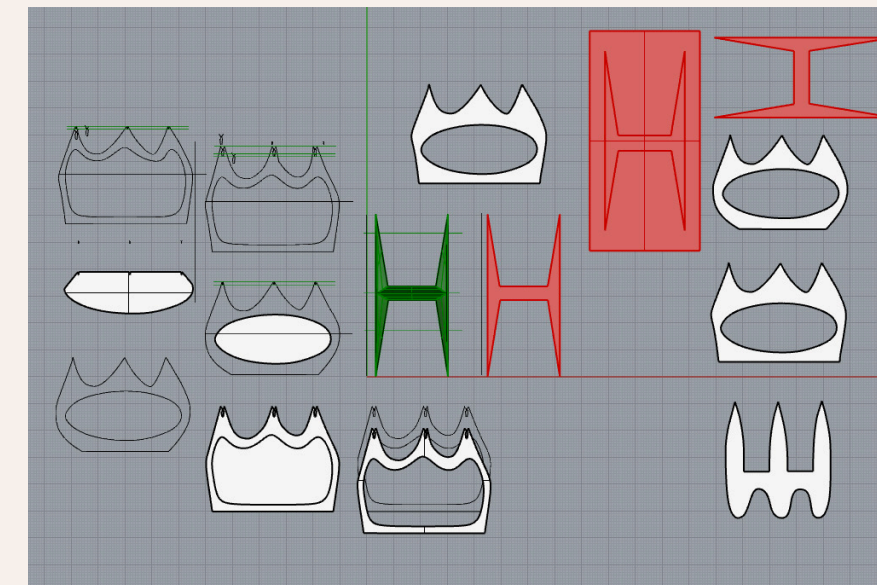
This step involved a lot of trial and error, in addition to remodeling, before deciding the final

57 Eric Meier, "Wenge," Wood Database, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.wood-database.com/wenge/>.

designs to be routed through the CNC machine. I had to 3D print the shapes multiple times, and test the hand-grip with multiple hand sizes, until I identified the correct dimensions that could recreate the Sholoukh symbol, while simultaneously enabling the user to control their use of the stamp when pressing it against a face.

After finalizing the dimensions, I moved to the CNC process. I first used a scrap piece of wood to try and carve out the shape, then I began working on the most challenging part in the CNC process, which is the 3D CNC. Then I used another scrap piece to carve out the shapes and it was successful.

The final outcomes of the stamps are successfully functional, as they are comfortable to handle and work with the face features of multiple users. They imitate the symbols when pressed on the skin, and the longer it is pressed on the skin the longer the mark stays. It was sanded and coated using oil that is used for kitchen cutting boards, therefore it is not harmful to the user's skin.



**FIGURE 30 - 3D modeling stamps - Rhino**

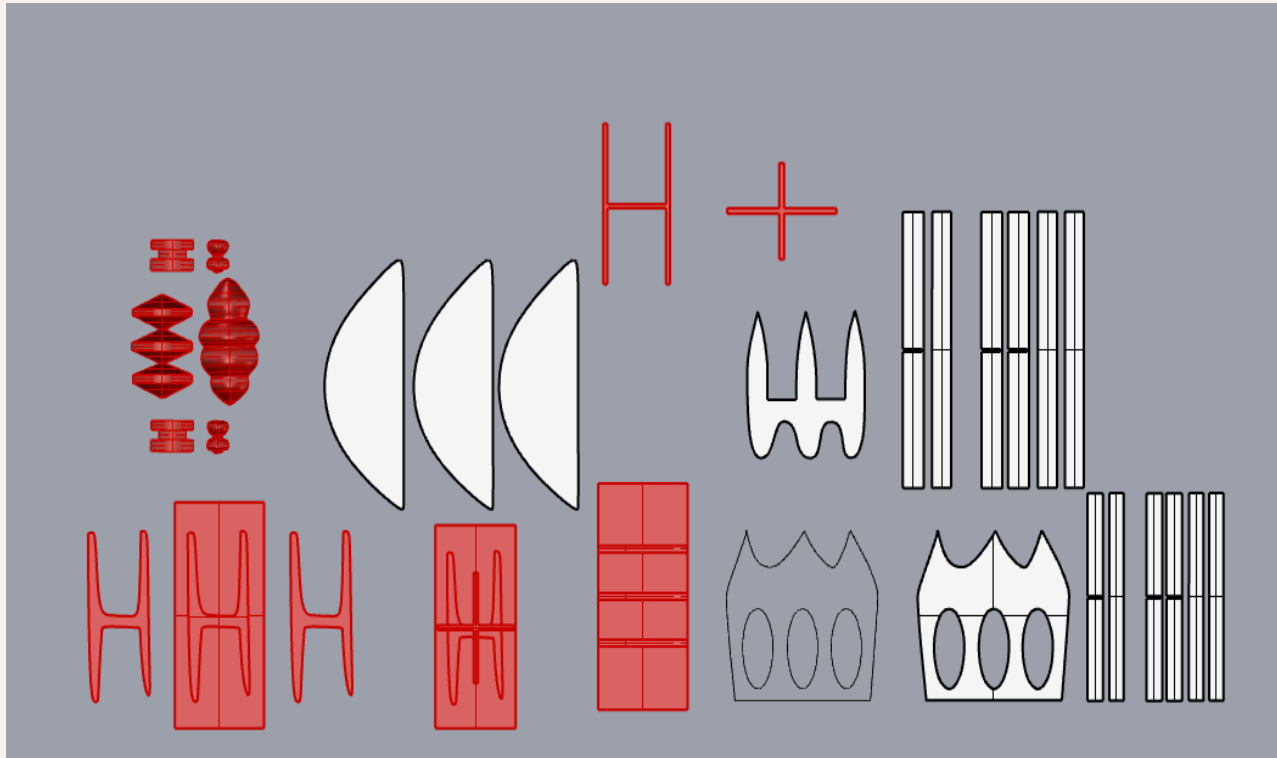


FIGURE 31 - 3D modeling stamps - Rhino

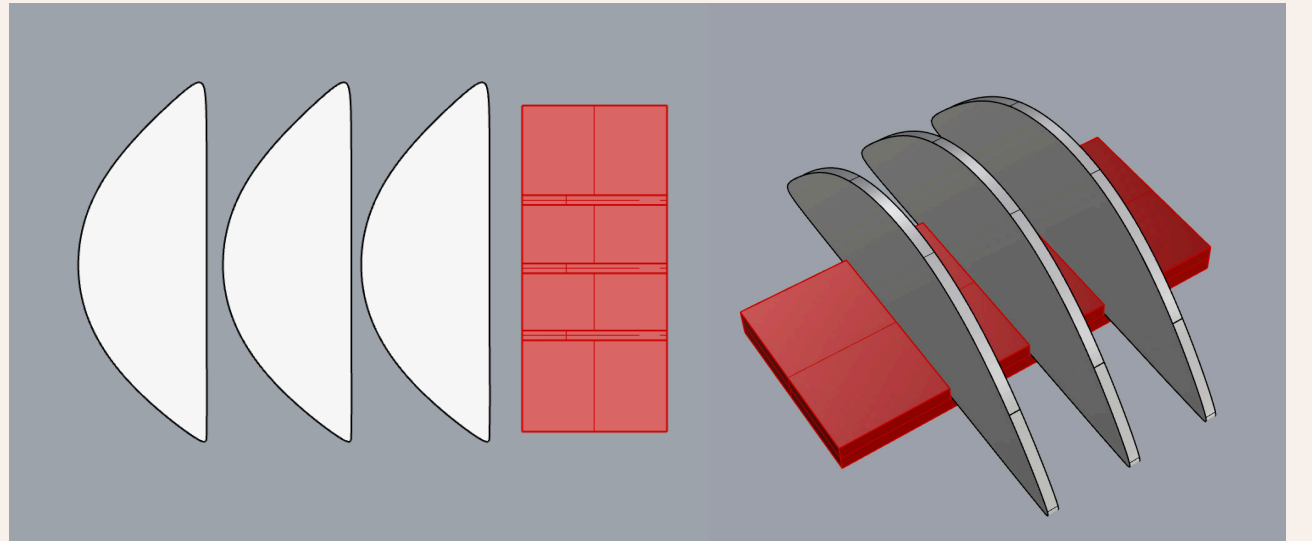
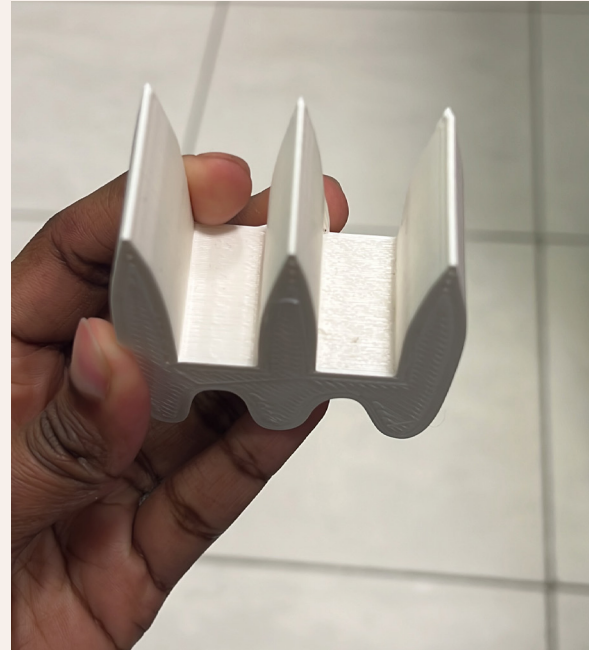


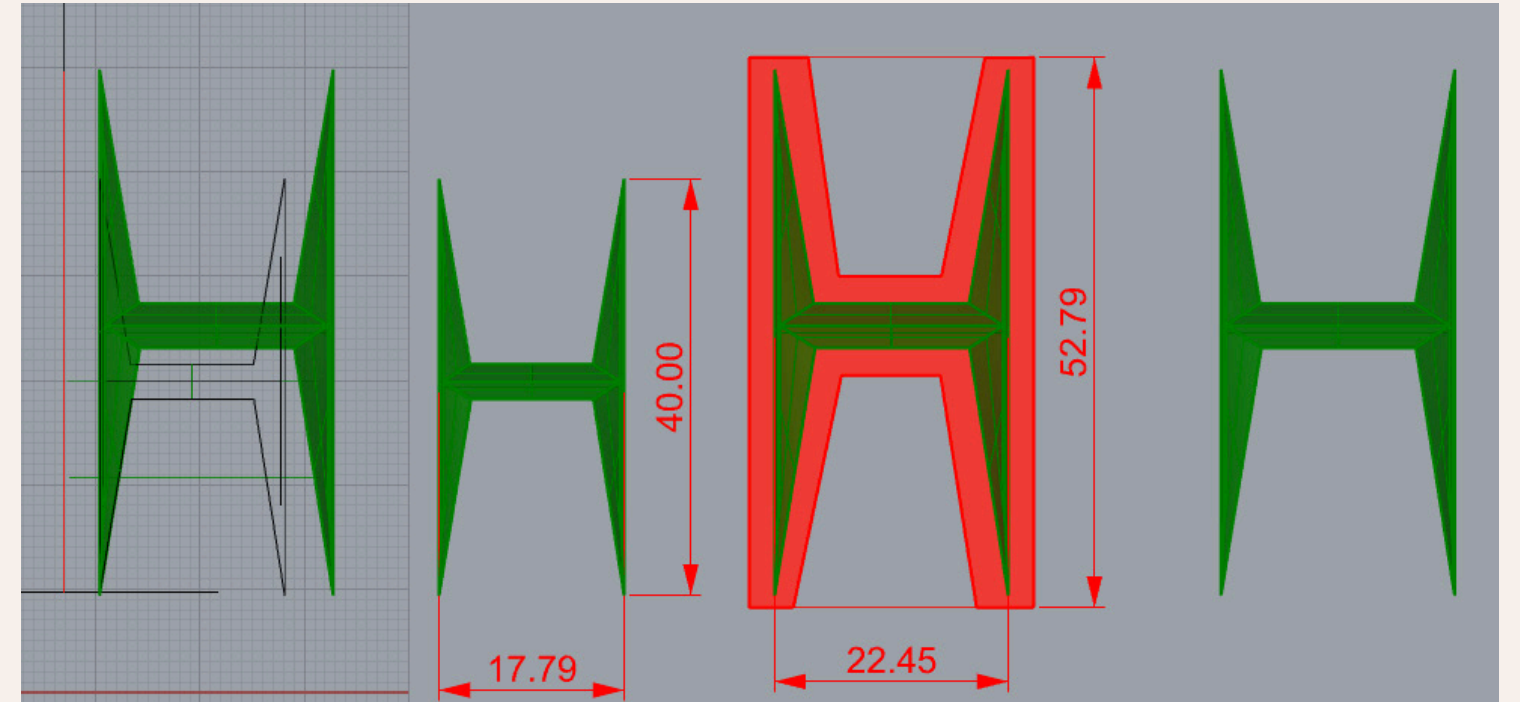
FIGURE 32 - 3D modeling stamps - Rhino



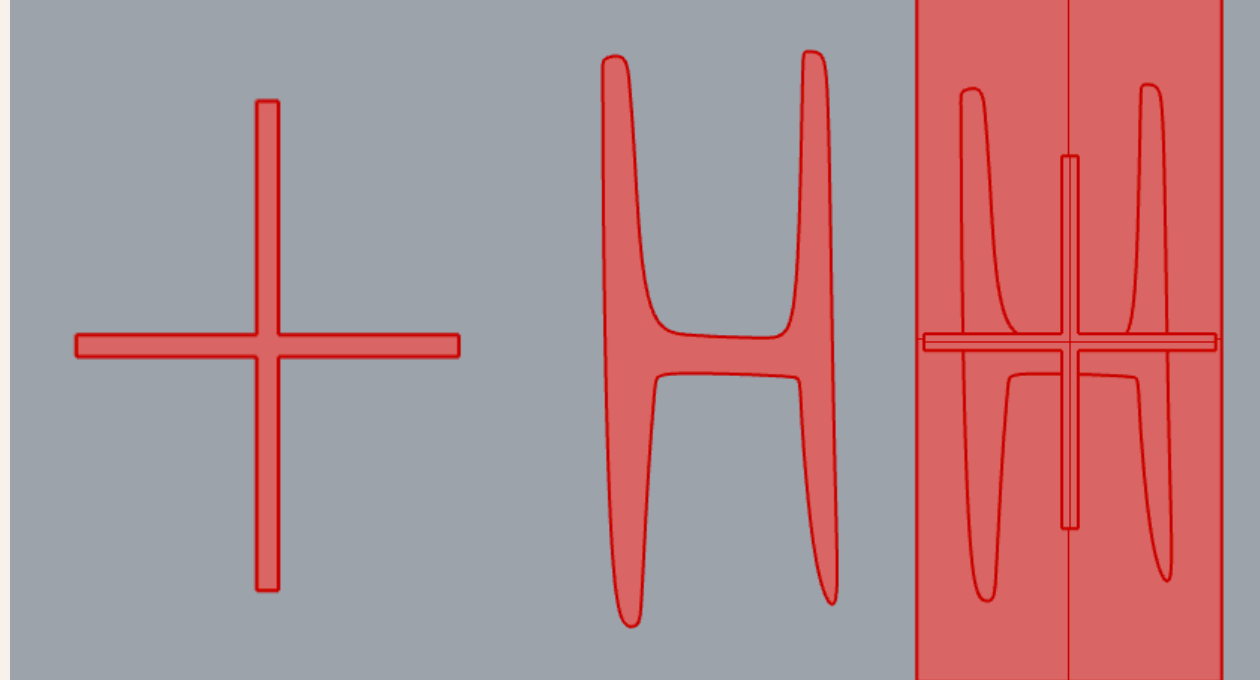
**FIGURE 33** - 3D model (Three strips), experiments - Rhino



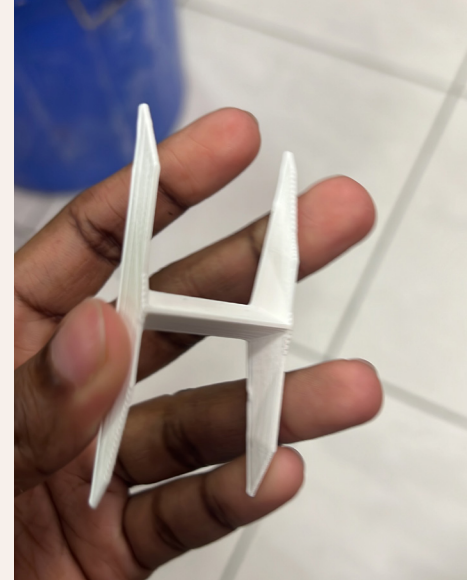
**FIGURE 34** - 3D model (Three strips), experiments - Rhino



**FIGURE 35** - 3D modeling H symbol stamp - Rhino



**FIGURE 36 - 3D modeling stamps - Rhino**

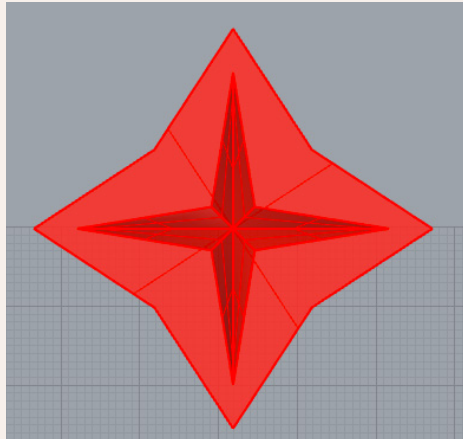


**FIGURE 37 - 3D printed H symbol stamp - process**



**FIGURE 38 - Three strips symbol CNC - process**





**FIGURE 39 - Final (cross symbol) stamp 3D model - Rhino**



**FIGURE 40 - (Cross symbol) stamp 3D printed**



**FIGURE 41 - (Cross symbol) stamp CNC test piece**

**FIGURE 42 - CNC process**







**FIGURE 43 - Wenge wood for final pieces**



**FIGURE 44 - 3D CNC (H symbol & Cross symbol) - wenge wood**



**FIGURE 45 - Final CNC stamp pieces before sanding and polishing**





**FIGURE 46 & 47 - FINAL OUTCOME  
(Cross stamp) - angle view and in use**





**FIGURE 48 & 49 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
(Small three strips stamp) - angle view and in use



**FIGURE 50 & 51 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
(Three strips) stamp - angle view and in use 2023





**FIGURE 52 & 53 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
(H stamp) - angle view angle view and in use 2023

## 2. BLADE HOLDERS

The main tool used in the ritual of Sholoukh is the universal razor blade (figure 50). The set of blade holders are based around the geometry of the original tool. I created holders that are designed to hold the stamps in a way to easily create the intended marks (figure 51). Since the focus is on the three symbols (three vertical stripes, cross, and capital H), the goal of the design process was to innovate the tools in order to renovate, and at the same time preserve, the practice of the Sholoukh ritual. . After further experimentation, I realized that the regular rectangular shape blade could be applied to all of the blade holders. Using a finished product, rather than a custom made one, simplified the connection to the 3d printed holders and helped prevent the rotation and bending of the blade.



**FIGURE 54 - 3D printing blade holders**

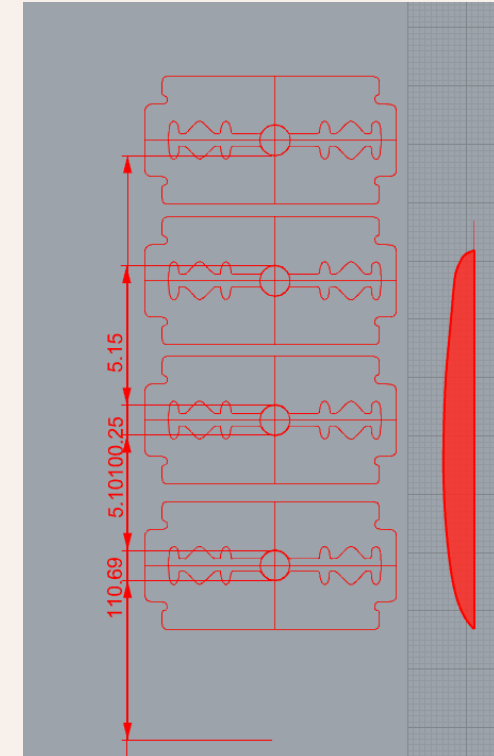


Before reaching the four final outcomes, I struggled to design a well constructed holder. I started by tracing the unique shape of the razor blade, for it to be fixed in the design of my choice and see how it would hold. Figure 52) demonstrates my experiments with different sizes of blade holders. They all failed, so I tried to use a cylinder shape to simplify it (figure 53), but the cylinder created tension and pressure on the blades which caused them to rotate. I modified the design into an extruded rectangle to stop rotating and prevent the blade from bending. As an additional security measure, I created a goat leather cover to hold the blade firmly in place. After further experimentation, I discovered that the rectangular shape design could be applied to all of the blade holders.

To improve the grip of the scaring tools, I have decided to create a leather cover. The aim is to firmly secure the blade and not give room for accidents to happen during the ritual process.. I used goat leather brought from Sudan, which is commonly used in Sudanese hand-crafted items, including shoes, handbags, and jewelry.

The final prototype (figure 59) worked nicely, and it showed potential for the final design, however (figure 60) it did not allow the blade to come out without cutting the leather.. The leather holder needed to secure the 3D prints firmly in order to allow a clean cut. It is also crucial to be able to easily change the blades after use. Each object had its challenges. I worked with the leather artisan (figure 63) in trying to minimize the use of glue in the cover and give it a more luxurious look.

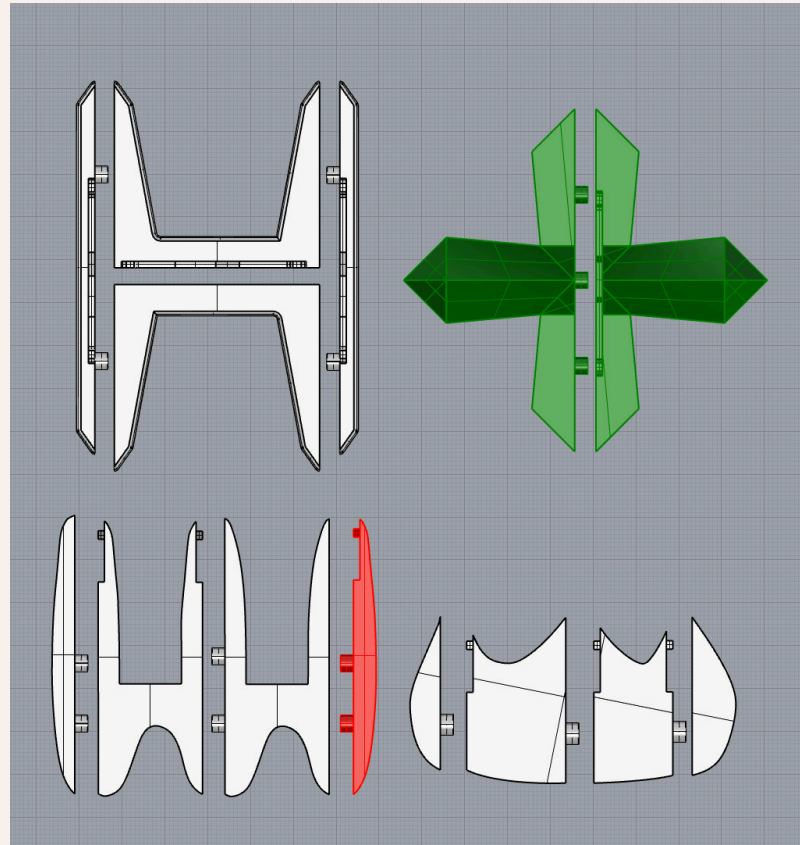
The final outcomes of the blade holders became fully functional, the 3D printed blade holders fit firmly the razor blade, and to secure it even further the goat leather cover provides a firm grip that allows the user to use the tools comfortably while performing the Sholoukh ritual.



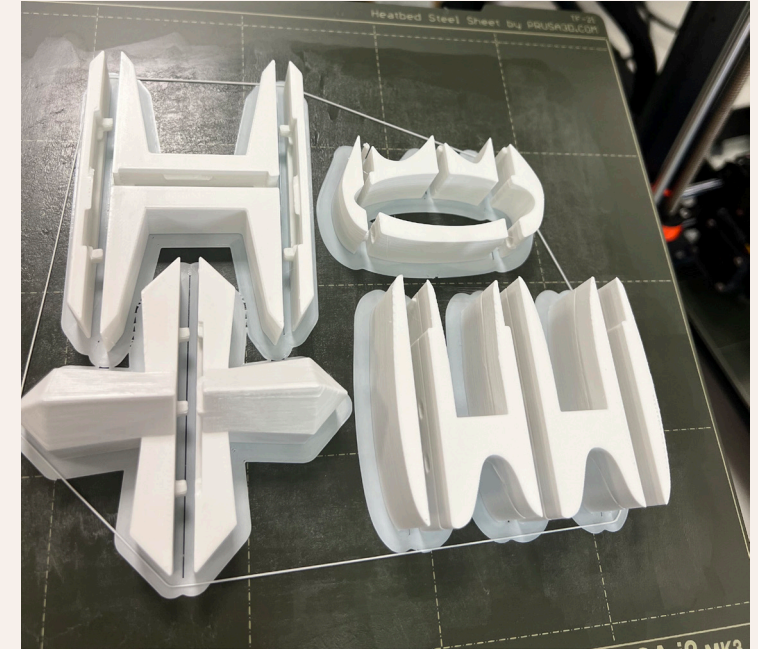
**FIGURE 55 - Blade model sketches - Rhino**



**FIGURE 56 - Blade holder - process**

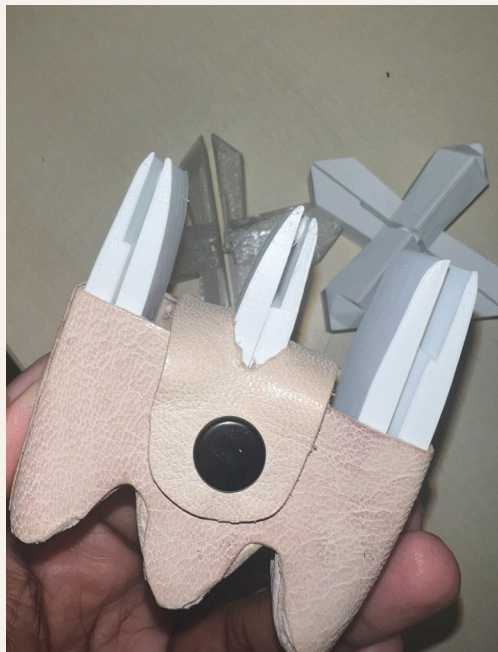


**FIGURE 57 - Final blade holders**  
Rhino models



**FIGURE 58 - 3D printed blade holders**





**FIGURE 59 - Leather prototype - process (front view)**



**FIGURE 60 - Leather prototype - process (bottom view)**

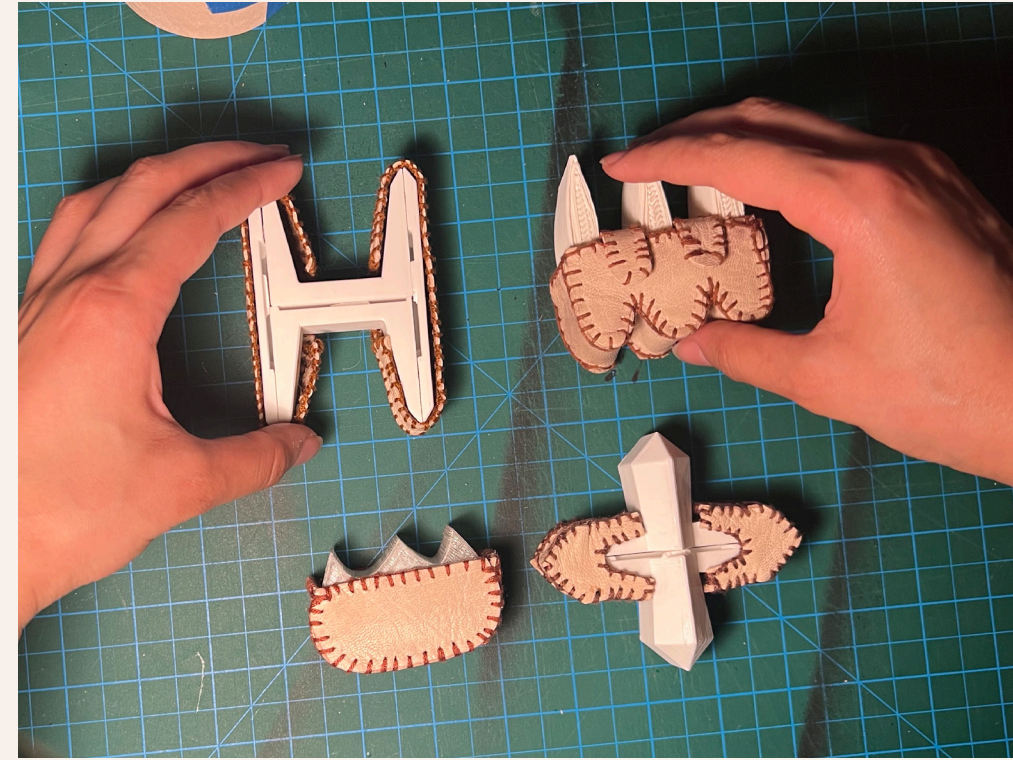


**FIGURE 61 - Leather prototype - process**





**FIGURE 62 - Blade holder  
leather process**



**FIGURE 63 - Blade holder  
leather outcome**

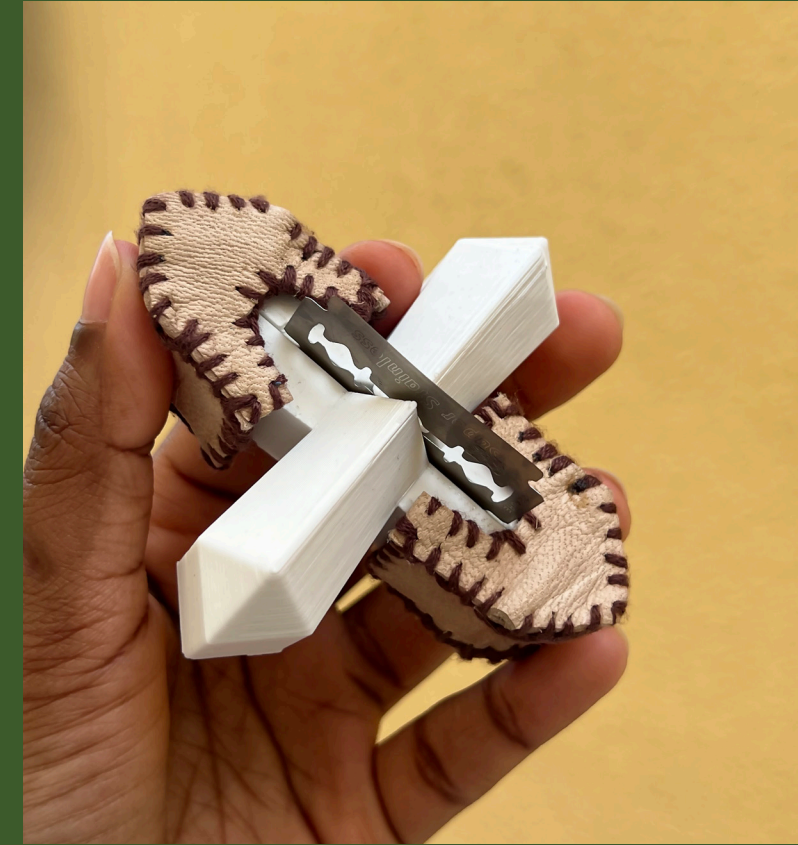




**FIGURE 64 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Cross blade holder front view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 65 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Cross blade holder back view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 66 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Cross blade holder side view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 67 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Small three strips blade holder side view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 68 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Small three strips blade holder side view (3D printed + leather)





**FIGURE 69 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Three strips blade holder side view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 70 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Three strips blade holder side view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 71 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
H Blade holder front view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 72 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
H Blade holder back view (3D printed + leather)



**FIGURE 73 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
H Blade holder side view (3D printed + leather)



### 3. HEALING

Healing is the final step and it is a crucial part of the Sholoukh ritual, and is what determines the quality of the scarred form and color. Originally, the Sudanese would use charcoal and ash to clean the scarred area to facilitate the formation of a dark-colored wound once the healing process is complete. Charcoal has been recognized for its medicinal purposes, including applications for teeth whitening, oral health, kidney health, skin care, skin infections, and more<sup>58</sup>. Ash is another material that soothes the scar and facilitates healing. In response to this major aspect of the Sholoukh process, I created a cotton pad container that could be covered with a sleeve. A small box was designed into the top of the sleeve to store the grinded charcoal and ash (figure..).After Sholoukh is performed, coal and ash are applied to the wound multiple times during the first few days of healing. The cotton pad container is wrapped with goat leather brought from Sudan. I have printed the cotton pad holder (figure ..) to fit the dimensions of the cotton pads. The box attached to the top of the sleeve cover serves two purposes: the bottom of the covered box serves as a lid to preserve the cleanliness of the cotton pads, while the interior of the box contains the grinded charcoal and ash. I

58 Sellers, "What are the benefits of activated charcoal?" 2023

used a lot of the support for the 3D print to secure the thread when opening and closing the powder container. For the final outcome, the containers are covered in goat leather to unify the look and feel of the entire kit. including the stamps and blade holders (figure 69,70). I have added coal and ash to the final piece and tests indicated that opening and closing the container was user-friendly.



FIGURE 74 - FINAL OUTCOME  
Healing part of the kit



**FIGURE 75 - Cotton pad holder - process**



**FIGURE 76 - Cotton pad holder cover/ powder container - process**



**FIGURE 77 - Cotton pad holder and cover placed together - process**





**FIGURE 78 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Cotton pad holder cover/ powder container (lid on) -  
front view



**FIGURE 79 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Cotton pad holder cover/ powder container (lid off) -  
top view



**FIGURE 80 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Cotton pad holder - front view



**FIGURE 81 - FINAL OUTCOME**  
Cotton pad holder - top view



***KIT IN USAGE***



**FIGURE 82 - Stamp usage**



**FIGURE 83 - Blade holder usage**



**FIGURE 84 - Healing usage**

## 4. FAMILY PORTRAIT

The Family Portrait is a collection of images that I have gathered from Sudanese people, living in Sudan and abroad, who captured the last memories of this dying art form. It was challenging to gather images, as a lot of them were forgotten behind dust cabinets around the house, and it took effort for people to look for them. Many people didn't even realize that they had images of their family members with Sholoukh, as this practice was seen as ancient and to them that was the default appearance of their grandparents.

This portrait allows me to convey the collective richness and value that these individuals attribute to a ritual that is meant to be honored throughout their whole lives. I used different social media platforms to reach out to the contacts I made during my visit to Sudan, including artists and designers, and I have asked them to share images of their family members that have Sholoukh. I used my graphic design skills to create this collage (figure 85), I organized and edited the images to make the collective *Family Portrait* that introduces these individuals as one big family, all coming from the same mother: Sudan.



FIGURE 85 - Family Portrait  
110 x 110 cm





**Fadul Elnour Mohamed**  
My grandfather  
T Shalukh (Jaali)

no1



**Haja Raya**  
Rawan Merghini great grandmother  
Alabadlabi Shalukh (Halfawya)

no2



**Jara Mosa**  
Grandmother of Abubakir Ibrahim  
Three strips horizontal Shalukh

no3



**Dr. Yousif Fadul Hasan**  
Author of the book ShoLoukh  
H Shalukh (Jaali)

no4





**Bilala Ahmed Abukashwa**  
Grandmother of a volunteer  
Three strips vertical Shalukh

no5



**Kalthoum Babikr Mohamed**  
Family relative  
Alabadlabi Shalukh (Halfawya)

no6



**Amna**  
Grandmother of Reem Abubakir  
Three strips Shalukh

no9



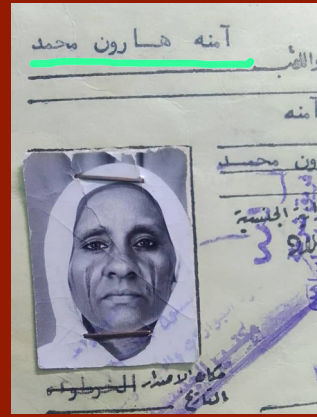
**Saadia**  
Family relative  
Three strips Shalukh

no10



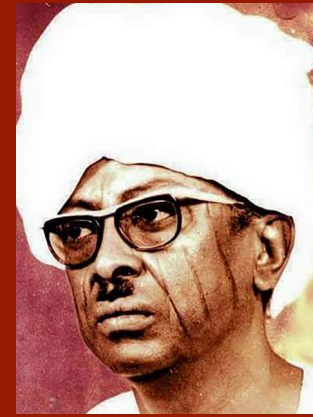
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My grandfather

no7



**Amna Haroon Mohamed**  
Grandmother of Amna Altaj  
Three strips vertical Shalukh

no8



**Ahmed Awad**  
Grandfather of a volunteer  
Three strips vertical Shalukh(Jaali)

no11



**Umalhasan Jaiballah Alshiekh**  
Kamal Abdulmonem grandmother  
Three strips Shalukh

no12





**Photographer Median**  
By Instagram: malamih.sudania

no13



**Sittna Nasir Gassim**  
Grandmother of Ali  
Three strips (Mahasia)

no14



**Photographer Median**  
By Instagram: malamih.sudania

no15



**Sufi Shiekh**  
Picture by: Kamal Abdulmonem  
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no16

# C O N C L U S I O N

The traces of the beautifully sacred legends and the rituals of Sholoukh are vanishing away, and nothing is left from it but the old images of our beloved elderly. Are we, as Sudanese, losing ourselves through the modernity of our current lives?

Through the exploration of the richness of the Sholoukh tribal symbols, the deconstruction of the regular blade, the only tool used in this ritual, and my ethnographic study visit to the motherland, I was able to find answers to my initial questions. I understood that modernity, education, and religion, in addition to the trauma that came from practicing the ritual without previous knowledge of its importance, encouraged the Sudanese to abandon the practice of Sholoukh and stop carrying their pride identity as a permanent mark on their face. Although times have changed, this research project gives us a chance to reflect on Sholoukh as a collective experience, and adapt it to our current lifestyle.

Through the outcomes I have created, the tools became a way to bring back this ritual in an innovative manner and provide a choice to its user to carry on the legacy of these symbols both temporarily and permanently. Also, portraying the beauty of the Sudanese heritage that we once had in our families and tribes, that creates the land we call Sudan with all its diverse richness. The project provides a chance to perceive what was seen as painful in a new and innovative manner.

**FIGURE 84 - University of Khartoum  
Sudan, 2022**





# **A C K N O W L E D G M E N T**

## **VCUQ MFA, FAMILY, & FRIENDS**

Thank you for making this come true, your constant support and motivation through challenging and hard times allowed me to come out of this experience as a new person. This project was an excuse for me to learn and put myself outside my comfort zone in achieving everything that I have learned in this two years long program. I cannot simply take the credit for this achievement all to myself, the whole MFA faculty contributed not just in teaching us what is required by a syllabus, but in our individual growth despite the challenges that came along, it even allowed me to take my last trip to Sudan to expand this research to reach it's fullest. The patience and constant love and support by my family and friends pushed me to reach this point in the moments of doubt and confusion, this is a result of a collective of emotions, trials, errors, and unforgettable fruitful memories. Thank you once again from the bottom of my heart.

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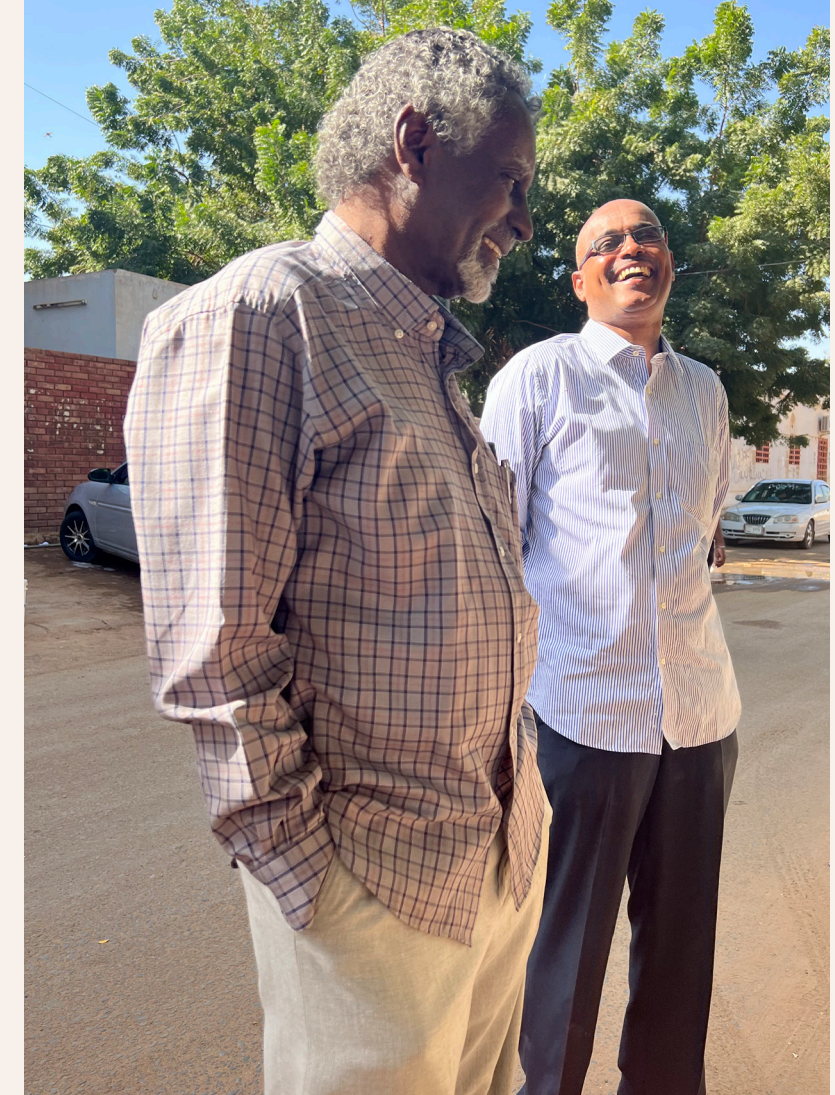
## ***Dr. Osman Merghani***

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Shihabaldeen Merghani  
Prof. Nooraldaym  
Dr. Alsadig Ajabna***

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**Prof. Abdunassir**

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**Khadija Mnawar**

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***Mr. Fadul Elnour***

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Thank you dearly to everyone that how allowed me to cross this bridge and supported me in anyway possible.



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No.2: Haja Raya, Rawan Merghini great grandmother Alabadlabi Shalukh (Halfawya)

No.3: Jara Mosa, Grandmother of Abubakir Ibrahim Three strips horizontal Shalukh

No.4: Dr. Yousif Fadul Hasan, Author of the book Sholoukh H Shalukh (Jaali)

No.5: Bilala Ahmed Abukashwa, Grandmother of a volunteer Threes strips vertical Shalukh

No.6: Kalthoum Babikr Mohamed, Family relative Alabadlabi Shalukh (Halfawya)

No.7: Fadul Elnour Mohamed, My grandfather

No.8: Amna Haroon Mohamed, Grandmother of Amna Altaj Three strips vertical Shalukh

No.9: Amna, Grandmother of Reem Abubakir Three strips Shalukh

No.10: Saadia, Family relative Three strips Shalukh

No.11: Ahmed Awad, Grandfather of a volunteer Three strips vertical Shalukh(Jaali)

No.12: Umalhasan Jaiballah Alshiekh, Kamal Abdulmonem grandmother Three strips Shalukh

No.13: Photographer Median, By Instagram: malamih.sudania

No.14: Sittna Nasir Gassim, Grandmother of Ali Three strips (Mahasia)

No.15: Photographer Median, By Instagram: malamih.sudania

No.15: Sufi Shiekh, Picture by: Kamal Abdulmonem T Shalukh (Jaali & Sufi)

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